



Fake SAINT of the YEAR

You Wanted the
Perfect Saint?
Too Bad!

I

KABEDONDAIKOU

ILL. YUNOHITO





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Prologue: Reincarnated as the Fake Saint

A tragedy was coming to a close in the quiet of the forest; or perhaps, the ending *itself* was the greatest tragedy of all.

A young man was sobbing as he held the body of a young girl to his chest. She was dying and all he could do was embrace her as she slowly turned cold.

“Ver... I... Having you by my side truly was...a blessing...”

“No! Don’t die! You can’t! Don’t leave me!”

When did our fates diverge? Why did it have to end this way?

It was already too late to find the answer to those questions. Things could no longer change...

The only thing the young man could do now was to lose himself in regrets.

“Ver... I love...you...”



I was overcome by sadness as I watched the scene unfold on my computer screen. I was so devastated I felt like I might’ve been able to throw a perfect assassination fist, Ryuken-style, out of sheer sadness—*Fist of the North Star*, anyone? After all, didn’t he say something along the lines of “life springs from nothingness” or whatever?

Aaaaaaaaargh, I’m gonna cry! Wait, everything’s getting blurry... Too many tears. Can’t see the screen anymore. Oh jeez—get a load of that ugly scrunched-up face. Who’s that ugly bastard? Wait. That’s my reflection, isn’t it? Yeah, that’s totally me.

My name’s Fudou Niito. As my name might’ve suggested, I was a lazy NEET. Well, to be fair, I wasn’t a *real* NEET—I did work as a web writer.

I was currently playing a dating sim called *Kuon no Sanka Fiore caduto eterna*, or *Eternal Scattering Flowers Fiore caduto eterna*. Interestingly enough, the kanji characters used and their reading aren’t the usual ones.

The characters for “kuon”—eternity—were normally read “eien,” while “sanka”—scattering flowers—should’ve been written and read “sange” like the Buddhist rite. My guess was that the writer just coined the words as he went. The use of the word “kuon” to refer to eternity—although it was spelled with different characters—was also related to Buddhism. I supposed they might’ve gone with the Buddhist rite of scattering flowers in order to keep the title cohesive.

That being said, the Italian part was *also* weird. They used a masculine noun, but put the adjective after it in the feminine form, to say nothing about the incorrect verb. All in all, the title was full of inconsistencies, so I could only assume the person who wrote it had no idea what they were doing.

The game was set in the magic academy of Fiori. You played as Verner—the most boring guy in existence—and had to try to hit on one of twenty heroines. The game’s distinguishing point, as it were, was that in almost every single route, the girl you picked ended up dying.

Hey, that’s probably why they decided to add “scattering flowers” in the title...

Anyway, the pretty girl who’d just died in my last playthrough was called Eterna. She was the main heroine, the final boss, and...my number one waifu. I’m not kidding when I tell you the only reason I picked up this title at my usual game shop was because I fell in love after seeing her on the cover.

The only problem was that...my beloved waifu died in every single ending except the bad one, even though she was the main heroine and everything! Despite her name, she was the very opposite of eternal!

I know no one asked why, but I’ll happily provide a short explanation anyway.

In a nutshell, Eterna was a saint. She was born to face the witch—the villain hellbent on messing up everything in their world—and fated to save the world. Oh, by the way, you could also date the witch in the game. She had a heartbreaking backstory and all, but that had nothing to do with Eterna’s story, so I’ll just skip that. Besides, having a terrible past isn’t an excuse to do whatever you want...

Anyway, back on track. As I was saying... Eterna, the saint who was born to

defeat the witch, was involved in a mix-up at birth. She was swapped with another baby and ended up growing up in a poor village where she met the main character, Verner.

The fake saint who took her place was called Ellize, and she was utter trash and a piece of shit. She used her title to get away with all the awful things she did. Like I said—utter trash. In fact, I'd go as far as to call her the worst piece of trash in the world. Needless to say, she wasn't one of the game's heroines, and you couldn't date her.

Thankfully, her crimes finally ended up catching up to her, and she died like the dog she was. Unfortunately, she left behind another pile of headaches in doing so.

While Eterna and the fake had always been two different people, many weren't aware of that fact. Rioters had already started an anti-saint movement before the truth came out. They ended up raiding Eterna's hometown and slaughtering her parents and close friends. As a result, Eterna lost all faith in humanity and flew into a rage. That was how she ended up being the final boss in most of the other girls' routes. You needed to slay her to clear the game in almost every single route. Wasn't that incredibly depressing?

The only route where you were able to reconcile with her was her own route, but...she still ended up freaking dying anyway! She fulfilled her duties as the saint and sacrificed herself to defeat the witch. She died in the arms of the main character—also known as the heart-wrenching scene I'd watched just now.

I just can't... She didn't deserve that...

Everything was that damn fake's fault! If she didn't exist, Eterna could've lived happily!

Arrrrgh! Couldn't they have added some new content or something?! I *needed* a save-my-little-Eterna route! Seriously, come on!

At this point, I'd even be happy with a fanfic. I just needed someone to write it, pleaaaaase! I would've done it myself, but my writing skills were hopeless. The best I could do was a script... Look, the author could even go as cliché as they wanted—like having an original character getting transported to an isekai or something—and I swear I wouldn't even complain! As long as Eterna's fate

could be changed, I'd be thankful. Oh and could they please erase the freaking fake saint from existence while they were at it?! Thanks.

To be honest, I liked Eterna even more because of all the hardships she had to go through but I just wished she could've had at least *one* happy ending. I guess I couldn't bring myself to like characters who just had it all—it was too far removed from reality. Life wasn't easy, after all. So yeah, while I was usually the type to cheer for characters who'd been through a lot, in Eterna's case...it was just too much.

Lost in my thoughts, I turned off my computer and crawled under the covers. It was already three in the morning. I'd been so focused on Eterna that I'd forgotten to go to bed.

I'm so sleepy... All right, time to hit the sack. Good night. Damn it! At least I can dream of Eterna living a happy life!

My body felt incredibly sore and heavy, but I guess that was what I got for staying up so late...

When I woke up the next morning, I was inside a castle I'd never seen before. If someone asked me to explain my situation in a hundred words or less, my answer would be... Nope. No way. For real, I had *no idea* what in the world was going on.

Had I been kidnapped? If so, the kidnappers were already freaking loaded. And where the hell *was* I?

*Do we even have European-looking castles like this in Japan? Wait. The D*sney hotels kinda look like this, don't they?*

To be fair, being kidnapped didn't sound too bad if I got to stay in such a cool place. No matter how I thought about it, going from living in a cramped apartment to living in a castle was a huge upgrade.

I decided to get out of my new, comfy, super-soft bed while I pondered over the situation. When I did, I noticed that the furniture looked incredibly tall.

What's going on here? How is the room so big?! In what world is furniture this huge? Just look at that humongous mirror!

“Huh...? AH! AAAAAAAH!!!”

I heard a strange voice—high-pitched, clear, and way too melodious to be my own—as I stepped closer to the mirror. The thing was, it definitely had come out of my throat.

Plus, the reflection in the mirror wasn't me.

A doll-like face—complete with large, bright green eyes that shone like jewels and flowing, waist-length honey-blond hair—gazed back at me. She looked like she was made in CG. It reminded me of the remake of that famous RPG; you know, the one that blew up because the characters were so well-made you could see their pores and peach fuzz.

Yeah, it definitely looks like that. Wow, my skin is so smooth.

There were no spots or wrinkles whatsoever. I could barely see any pores or peach fuzz even if I stuck my face close to the mirror. I brought my hand to my cheek and was shocked by how nice and soft it felt under my fingers.

It's really...me. The pretty girl I saw in the mirror followed my moves to a T, so there was no way I was wrong about this.

So I'm a girl now? All right, all right. We've got some genderswapping going on here.

I was still the same old me inside, though, so I totally failed to see the appeal. Even if I became the prettiest girl ever, it'd be a complete waste considering my personality.

Sure, looks are important but the inside is just as crucial!



It's like in manga, you know. When the girl has a shit personality, even panty shots don't hit the same.

Actually, now that I'd taken a closer look, I had a feeling I'd seen this castle before... Or maybe I hadn't? It kinda looked like the saint's castle in *Kuon no Sanka*...

Wait. It doesn't just look like it—it's exactly the same. Aaaaall right. I get it now. I knew exactly what was going on. I was dreaming of *Kuon no Sanka*, wasn't I?

And...while the girl in the mirror was still young, her beauty was already shining through. She was brimming with charisma and a sacred aura seemed to surround her. She just had to be...the young Eterna! I was currently in the body of the cutest girl ever, the main heroine of *Kuon no Sanka*.

She didn't look quite the same in 3D as she did in 2D, but there was no way this beauty could belong to anyone else. Her hair and eye color were also a bit off, but it wasn't like anyone would care about those small details. Game characters always changed a little between the concept art and the final product, after all. For instance, some characters that were supposed to have black hair ended up with a shade of blue instead. Others had bright pink or green hair when they were never supposed to initially, just to make them easier for the players to visually distinguish. I had a feeling her facial features weren't exactly the same either, but it made sense—it'd be impossible to have the exact same face in 2D and 3D.

I see, I see. My wish had been heard, hadn't it? I wanted to have a beautiful dream in which Eterna was happy, but this probably meant I had to make her happy myself. If the only way to make her happy was to become her, then...

Sure! Let's roll with that.

To be honest, I'd always been curious about how it felt to be a pretty girl, so this was the perfect chance to live like one. Oh, don't get me wrong—I was perfectly happy with being a man, and I'd hate to stay inside a girl's body forever, but I was down to try for a short while.

Oh, uh... Just putting this out there, but sleeping with—or even kissing—

another dude is a hard pass, though.

Even if my appearance had changed a lot, my mind hadn't, so I had no interest in that kind of stuff. Just thinking about some guy's face getting closer to mine and taking up my whole field of vision...

Yeah, no, I can't. There's just no way. Whatever! I can do this!

Err, not the kissing dudes part. I just meant I could roll with the genderswapping thing.

Now that I had become Eterna, I'd do everything in my power to make her happy! As soon as I achieved that, I'd give her body back to her.

Just as I'd finished gathering my thoughts, a man who looked like a butler stepped into the room.

"Oh, I see you're already awake, Lady Ellize," he greeted me.

FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!!! I'M THE FAAAAAAAKE!!!

It took me a few minutes of lying facedown in bed to regain my calm after understanding that I had transmigrated into the fake saint.

Talk about a major disappointment! I feel so betrayed.

Now that I knew I wasn't Eterna but rather the freaking fake—Ellize—I'd lost all motivation to do this seriously.

Yeah, I'm not doing this. Can the dream end already? I'm done. Doooone! So done. Literally over it. Game over. Bye-bye.

Out of all people, why did it have to be *her*?! Since I was also kind of a piece of shit myself, I supposed that our minds were more in sync in a way. That meant there was probably a good balance between the mind and body.

At least I didn't have to feel guilty about stealing her body. I didn't even feel the need to ever return it, actually. If Ellize got her body back, she'd definitely just end up acting like a bitch again.

Maybe I should just kill myself and get this over with.

The only issue was...I couldn't be sure this was only a dream.

I'd been in here for a while and it didn't look like I was about to wake up anytime soon. I'd had breakfast earlier, and it had tasted pretty good—just like regular food. On top of that, the longer I waited, the more awake I felt and the more everything around me started to feel real.

An old lady called for me. "Lady Ellize, it's time for your classes."

I figured it was better to answer my teacher politely for now. "Y-Yes! Thank you very much for reminding me."

If I started speaking like a rough guy out of nowhere, the people here were sure to be taken aback. Speaking like a girl was out of the question, though. Just thinking about it made me want to throw up. So I went with the same polite speech I'd used at work back when I was a part-timer. That was the best I was willing to do.

Now that I thought about it, it was strange that I could speak the language of this world perfectly. The structure was very similar to Japanese, and polite speech seemed to be a thing here as well.

For some reason, the old lady's jaw dropped open and she stared at me, aghast.

What's up, lady? Did I do something weird?

She shivered and happily exclaimed, "Lady Ellize! You... You said 'thank you'! It's the first time you've ever thanked me..."

Ah, I get it now. Even as a kid, Ellize acted like a little shit, didn't she?

After all, this was the girl who had no qualms firing people left and right if they displeased her, or—after growing up and rising to power—driving the people she didn't like to suicide. Hell, she'd even ordered a gang of ruffians to attack and **** one such woman without batting an eye.

Ellize really is the devil incarnate. Compared to her, the regular villainous ladies you see in stories are literal angels.

Considering her appearance, Ellize was roughly five years old right now. That meant she probably hadn't done anything too horrible yet—she was just an insufferable brat.

As I pondered over the situation, I effortlessly went through Ellize's classes. Needless to say, her studies were a walk in the park for me.

I mean, it'd be stranger if I struggled with elementary-school-level math, I guess.

I tried to envision my future as Ellize. At first, I'd been incredibly disappointed to have taken over her body but, now that I thought about it, this was a chance to save Eterna and give her a perfect happy ending.

Ellize's actions were at the root of Eterna's suffering. If it wasn't for her, I was certain Eterna could have a much happier life. The silver lining was that I was currently in control of Ellize's body. In other words, as long as I didn't do anything evil, everything would be fine.

I had no clue what state my real body was in right now. I couldn't even figure out if this was a dream, or if I'd taken possession of her body like in light novels. Maybe I'd just been reincarnated as Ellize from the start and recovered the memories from my past life by chance earlier today. Finally, there was a possibility that I was Ellize herself, and that I was simply confused because I'd inherited some random guy's memories by mistake.

Well, not that it really mattered. At the end of the day, I still loved happy endings and loathed bad ones with every fiber of my being.

I'll change this story, then. I'll save Eterna and Verner, and I'll overwrite all of the tragic events that plagued them. No, I won't stop with just the two of them—I'm not letting any of the other heroines meet their ends either! I'll make everyone happy!

Ellize was a piece of trash, but she was a very smart piece of trash—a genius, even. She was no saint, but she had an enormous reserve of mana, enough to be mistaken for one. She was also blessed with a great talent for close combat.

This was the very reason why she'd been swapped with Eterna at birth. Even as a baby, her tremendous potential and mana had shone through, and that was what had led everyone to assume she was the saint. I remembered fighting her in some of the routes and, let me tell you, she was freaking *strong*.

Worst of all, she had reached that level without ever breaking a sweat. This

kind of writing was only acceptable for villains. Even the official booklet described her as “a fiendish genius born into this world by mistake.”

Well, with that backstory, it only made sense that her fate was to get drunk on her own powers before eventually facing her demise.

Anyhow. The important thing was that if I made use of Ellize’s natural talent and worked hard every day from childhood...I’d probably be able to take down the witch when she appeared!

According to the lore, only the saint could hope to defeat the witch, but I knew for a fact that wasn’t true. In certain routes, it was possible to get rid of her without relying on Eterna.

All right. I’ve made up my mind. I’ll lead this world toward a happy ending. I’ll pull through even if I have to destroy Ellize’s body in the process!

The first step was to devote myself to my studies and practice magic as much as possible. Then, I’d start practical training.

I’d also be as nice as possible to my servants. Not that it’d be hard. My servants were all pretty ladies and, as we all know, being nice to pretty ladies is the most important duty of any proper gentleman.

Chapter 1: I'll Be the Perfect Fake Saint

They say time flies like an arrow, and I couldn't agree more.

In the blink of an eye, nine years had passed since I'd become Ellize, the worst piece of trash in the world. While I wasn't the brightest bulb in the box, even I had finally reached the conclusion that I wasn't in a dream.

If the game timeline had progressed without interruption, Ellize would've already ruined her natural beauty by gorging on food and alcohol, but I was different. I'd taken good care of myself, so I'd managed to maintain her good looks.

Ellize was so blessed that, even though I'd been the one enjoying it, I often got pissed off. I could remember anything after hearing it only once and learning magic was as easy as pie.

Oh, right—I'd forgotten to mention it earlier, but, yes, magic existed in this world. *Fantastic, right?*

All in all, this world followed most of the codes of regular medieval fantasy works with knights and magicians. I hadn't tried to change anything either. I figured it was better to leave things alone rather than throw weird pieces of knowledge into the mix and mess everything up.

To be fair, it wasn't like science wasn't a thing at all here. For instance, steam engines and locomotives had already been invented.

Anyway, there were eight magic attributes in this world: fire, water, earth, wind, thunder, ice, light, and darkness. In my case, I could use everything but dark magic, and I was especially good at light attribute spells.

I still thought it was way too funny that the fake was nothing like a real saint except when it came to her magic affinity.

Only the real saint and the witch were able to harness dark magic. Actually, the two of them could freely use every single type.

Anyway, back to the topic of my crazy body. Ellize was—and I can't stress this enough—a total monster! I could just do anything I put my mind to, whether it was copying magic spells, or even replicating moves and techniques I sort of remembered seeing in my previous...life. Uh, yeah, let's go with that.

Shooting a laser beam from the sky? Done! Flying around? Easy! Healing magic isn't supposed to work on these types of ailments? Don't care! Healed! No logs to fight vampires? I got you, bro! Here!

Everything was so easy it felt like I was cheating.

At first, I'd been a little worried. I wasn't sure I'd manage to be diligent in my efforts to train and study. It had turned out to be a needless worry, though—there were absolutely no distractions whatsoever here. If anything, the only fun things I ever got to do were combat training and magic practice, so I was more than happy to do so.

As a result, I ended up training every single day. Even outside of my designated classes, I still practiced magic as a hobby.

My teacher had gone as far as to ask me why I worked so hard, reassuring me that it was all right to take it easy and think of myself from time to time. I wasn't sure if honesty was the best policy in my case—would admitting that I was bored out of my mind be the best course of action?

In the end, I casually blurted out some bullshit along the lines of, "I used to be a bad child, so I need to do my best to meet everyone's expectations now! I used to only care about myself. Now I want to think about you!"

For some reason, my teacher was so moved that he started crying. Lol.

Another of my pastimes was going out to hunt monsters. And let me tell you, hunting monsters was...super freaking fun! Ha ha ha!

I'll admit it—I was a little worried at first. As a regular guy, I wasn't sure I'd do well in actual battles, but as it turned out, I was even more heartless than the real Ellize. How should I describe the feeling? Hee hee hee... Trampling down weaklings with my overwhelming powers delighted me in the most primal of ways. It was just so much fun!

As some video game villain once said, nothing beats getting drunk on your

own power! I finally understood just how right he'd been.

While I *did* realize I was acting like a fine piece of shit, I just couldn't help myself. Hunting was the best! I enjoyed the almighty, superior feeling it gave me. And to be honest, I was pretty sure anyone would get addicted to it. It was like a drug.

I strongly believed it was human nature to enjoy beating up weaklings. It just so happened that this fundamental nature was slightly more developed in me.

I'm sorry little monsters! I really am! Please forgive me, all righty? Let's go! Eat that! In your face, monster! I blasted the latest magic spells I'd learned at my target, and it was blown away. *Aah... It feels amazing. This has to be the greatest form of entertainment ever, guys.*

After I'd killed a few *too* many monsters, though, people eventually started questioning my motivations. That was when I hit them with a well-timed, "It pains me to do so, but I have to hunt monsters to protect everyone!"

Just like my teacher, they were all moved and started crying. Lmao.

I also did my best to spread the fame of the saint in preparation for when I'd step down and give Eterna her rightful place back. Ellize was a fake—an extra and nothing more. She didn't hold a candle to Eterna.

My fate was to wait for the true heroine to show up and yeet me out of the picture to reclaim what was originally supposed to be hers. I was perfectly all right with that prospect. It was only natural, after all.

The only issue was that, in the game, the endless list of crimes Ellize had committed had come back to bite Eterna in the ass after she was recognized as the real saint. This time, things would be different, though. I'd make sure the saint was loved and well-respected.

That meant doing charity work, I guess.

Usually, in isekai stories, the protagonists taught the people of their new world how to make tons of new things to improve their lives. Now, being the idiot I was, this wasn't an option for me. Instead, I focused on healing the people in the villages and towns around me. It also served as good magic practice.

Yes, yes, you would make for an excellent test subject! To heal this wound, I need to use...this spell! Hmm? Hang on, did I mess up?

Whoa, would you look at this girl? She looks fine—definitely my type. It's too bad she's got a scar on her face. Her leg's hurt too. What a waste, what a waste, I'd thought before using my healing magic. And... There! All fixed! Are you gonna fall for me now, baby?

Eventually, after I'd gone around and healed people left and right for a while, I was asked why I'd done all that.

"I want to help the people I can reach! That's the least I can do! My payment? A beautiful smile will do," I'd told them.

If you read between the lines, it also meant I wasn't going to bother with the people who were too far away. I'm not a yogi, all right?! I don't stretch, and I certainly don't have any intention of stretching myself too thin. Get it?

Anyway, they were moved. Started crying. Rofl.

I also met Verner, the main character of the game.

At the beginning of the game, both he and Eterna were seventeen. Since Eterna and Ellize were the same age, and I was currently fourteen, that meant there were still three years to go before the game's story started.

Actually, something happened to Verner when he was around fourteen. When playing the game, you only saw the scene as a flashback, but when he was a kid, he encountered a small part of the witch's soul and gained the ability to use the power of darkness (lol). When he was fourteen, this dark power (lol) awoke but, unable to harness it, Verner went on a rampage and began to be feared by the people around him.

Urgh... Everyone! Get away from me! The darkness that sleeps in my right arm will attack you! HA HA HA HA. Spoken like a true chuunibyou.

Anyway, as a result, Verner's family harshly criticized him before throwing him out. That was how the son of a lord wound up living like a pauper and grew up to be a spineless coward convinced he had no worth. He lived as a wanderer for a while before settling down in a small village where he met Eterna. After his traumatic experience, he sealed his powers deep within himself.

This led to all kinds of disasters during the main story. For instance, he could've avoided the death of his love interests if he'd just used his powers immediately instead of letting bad situations drag on. As a player, it was incredibly frustrating to wait *ages* for him to get over his trauma and start doing stuff.

The only way to beat the witch without the saint was actually to awaken the darkness that slept inside him (lol). In a nutshell, he managed to defeat her because he used the same power... Or something like that.

And so, I made sure to intercept Verner after he was kicked out of his home and cheer him on a little so he wouldn't think he was worthless, awful, or whatever...

"I...can still have a happy ending?" he asked me at the end of our discussion.

That reminded me so much of the actual ending of the game that I started bawling my eyes out. I promised him I'd do anything to make sure he got to have his happy ending. I didn't really want to hug another man but, as a beauty—well, on the outside, at least—I felt like I had no choice. I even gave him a complimentary hug. I tried my hardest to think of it as nothing more than a greeting. Like foreigners do, you know.

Here, look—a beautiful girl's embracing you. Rejoice! Inside said girl there's a rotten guy, but never mind that part.

So anyway, you know the drill by now. Verner was moved. Cried. Lol, lmao, rofl, all of the above.

While I was at it, I sucked up all of his excess power until it was back at a level he could control by himself. Magic was just so convenient! Now I could also fight the witch if I needed to.

To be honest, I'd only hugged him to steal his powers in the first place.

Since I wasn't the saint or the witch, doing that might've shortened my life span a bit. But who cared if a piece of trash died a little earlier than expected? If it could buy Eterna a happy ending, it was a good trade as far as I was concerned.

In case you were wondering why Verner didn't suffer from the same side

effects, well...his constitution somehow was strong enough to withstand it. Main characters were just built different. Well, that was *one* idea, at least. I remembered reading a theory that said Verner was a descendant of one of the witches of old, so that would explain that.

Oh, by the way, I also gave him a handmade pendant. I hadn't actually made it myself—I'd asked an artisan at my castle to do the work, then I'd infused it with magic. But that was already something, right? Anyway, the pendant would seal off part of his powers so that he'd have an easier time controlling it.

I knew that Verner continuously let dark mana seep out of his body. The witch had used that to track him down and send monsters to attack his village. That had led to Eterna's first tragedy. I figured I might as well avoid that event altogether if I could. The pendant would help with that.

I took the chance to cram all of my hopes and dreams in there too.

You have to go the Eterna route, Verner! Make her happy! You have to, all right?! I thought as I infused it with mana. *I really want to see Eterna's happy ending!*



If someone played a part to perfection, would they still only be a fake? If they were identical to the original—or better, even, to the point no one could tell the difference—would there truly be one? Even if, deep down, that person was nothing but a piece of trash, I'm certain it wouldn't make a difference to the ones that'd received salvation.



The saint Ellize was the very personification of the word selfish. She grew up in an environment where all of her whims had been accepted, so she'd never learned how to stop her greed. No matter what she asked for, it was given to her. No matter what she did, she was forgiven.

Why? Simply because she was the saint, the one born to rid the people of their greatest fear—the witch. Without her, the people would lose all hope. They'd eventually all die at the hand of the monsters that served the witch. That was why the saint was the most important person in the world. Her life

was worth more than that of any other.

Since she was raised with a silver spoon in her mouth, Ellize didn't consider anyone else's life important. And she never felt like she owed anyone any gratitude either.

It was only natural that she got to eat the best food, live in the nicest castle, and have the most servants taking care of her every need. If anything, she considered it the bare minimum, and if that standard wasn't met, she'd get moody.

However, when she was five, Ellize changed. She suddenly became polite and learned to thank the people around her. She'd always been horrible to her servants, but she started treating them with care and respect. She'd always hated to study and train, but she became keen to learn and better herself.

Needless to say, her bountiful talent bloomed and she soon became a powerful magician. By the time she was ten, no one was her equal.

Everyone praised her natural talent.

They weren't wrong—Ellize *was* talented. However, the teachers who'd taught her how to wield a sword and use magic knew that her tremendous progress was the fruit of her extraordinary efforts. Ellize never wasted time; she trained like a possessed madwoman. She honed her sword and magic skills without rest and mastered all magic attributes—save for darkness. Her swordsmanship was so accurate that she'd most likely be able to cut two cells apart.

She was a true saint in every way.

By the time she was fourteen, her beauty started to shine. Her hair looked like it was spun gold, while her face looked like it had been shaped by God Himself. She was the picture of purity in her white dresses and treated everyone equally with a warm smile.

Once, a man who was in charge of protecting and instructing her had asked, "Lady Ellize, why do you push yourself so? I can't help but worry about you. You're already the most accomplished fighter I have ever seen. Please take better care of yourself! Give yourself some love!"

Ellize smiled gently. “In the past, I was a tyrannical and horrible child,” she started. “I misused my power as the saint and trampled on everyone’s expectations. When I understood the error of my ways, I vowed to live up to everyone’s expectations. You ask me to love myself, but I’ve already loved myself long enough. Now, I will share my love with everyone else. I love this world and I want to take care of it. That’s why I push myself.”

Her teacher couldn’t help but let his tears flow freely at her radiance. There could be no mistake, she was a true saint. To think that the selfish little girl had grown into such a fine young woman!

That day, each one of her teachers vowed to devote themselves to her with their whole souls.

According to a certain new recruit in the army, he’d witnessed a miracle.

Back then, he’d been in the grip of despair. Behind him was the town he had sworn to protect, and before him, an army of monsters serving the witch. There were at least a thousand monsters while the soldiers were no more than three hundred—a truly hopeless situation.

“Why aren’t the reinforcements here yet?!”

“We’re done! The country has forsaken this town!”

All around him, soldiers cried in despair. The king had abandoned them. No one would come to their aid.

Perhaps this town had no value from a strategic standpoint, or maybe they intended to use it as bait to lure the monsters while the capital’s defenses strengthened.

The man had just joined the army, so he didn’t have a good grasp on strategy yet. No one had explained anything. The only thing he clearly understood was the hopelessness of the situation. This place would soon become hell on earth.

“L-Let’s run away! Q-Quick!” a soldier stuttered.

“What will the people do if we run away?! And where do you want us to go?! We’re surrounded, you idiot!” cried another.

The new recruit was frozen in place, his teeth chattering.

No... I don't want to die! I don't want my life to end here without having accomplished anything!

But reality was cold and merciless. It did not care for his sorrow, and the monsters finally closed in on the soldiers. All around him, his comrade's screams echoed while blood splattered on the ground. The recruit couldn't move an inch, his legs trembling under him. He felt a warm liquid run down his legs.

At last, a monster finally appeared before him. It was about to end his nightmare when suddenly...a light flashed and destroyed all of the monsters in its wake.

To the poor recruit, it felt as though the heavens had finally executed judgment upon these sinners. A pillar of light had descended from a gap between the clouds and was progressively laying waste to the monsters' army.

After a while, a young girl in a pristine white dress came down from the heavens. A ray of light shone upon her, and she sparkled in the most wondrous of ways. The survivors found they couldn't take their eyes off of her.

She parted her cherry blossom-pink lips and uttered a single word. "Sorry..."

Before the recruit could understand what she'd said, she extended her hand, and a sphere of light flew out from her palm. It was small enough to fit in someone's hand, but after reaching the monsters' army, it exploded and expanded at once, erasing all traces of the monsters in its vicinity. She fired another sphere. Then a third. This continued, again and again, until the whole army had been eradicated.

Her might was overwhelming.

"The... The saint! It's her! To think she was so powerful!" a soldier suddenly exclaimed.

The recruit finally learned of their savior's identity—it was the symbol of light and humanity's only hope of defeating the witch, the saint. Immediately, he accepted the situation. It made sense for her to be so overwhelming. After all, she was in a league of her own.

After getting rid of the last monster, she calmly descended from the sky and set foot on the ground.

The mayor ran to greet her. “S-Saint! However can we thank you? Please allow us to invite you to our town! We’ll prepare a feast for you!”

“There is no need. I’m happy you wish to thank me, but sadly, this town isn’t the only place under attack. I must make haste,” she explained, looking in the distance as though her eyes were already gazing at her next battle.

The recruit felt the need to speak to her before she disappeared. He understood it would be rude of him, but he still had to ask. Why had she apologized to the monsters? Why did she fight so fiercely?

“S-Saint! Why... Why did you say sorry before attacking the monsters? And how are you able to dash into battle as you did earlier? Are you not scared?!”

It was rather impolite of him, and he expected the saint’s face to sour at his questions. Instead, however, she showed him a tender smile.

“They are also living beings,” she started, looking into the recruit’s eyes as she spoke. “And I ruthlessly trampled upon them. It’s deplorable and sinful, just like a hunter enjoying the thrill of the chase. Still, I have to continue fighting... Because I want to protect everyone.”

Her pained tone made the recruit realize his own stupidity. To her, even killing monsters was a sin that made her heart ache. No one else cared about the monsters being alive, and they certainly wouldn’t ever have blamed themselves for taking the beasts’ lives. After all, the monsters were frightening and horrible creatures, the enemies of humankind. But the saint was so kind that she concerned herself with the fate of monsters. Even then, she was still willing to sin to protect people.

Now that he’d understood all that, he felt incredibly ashamed of his questions.

On that day, the new recruit became a true soldier. He was still weak, and could never be compared to the saint, but he prayed he’d be able to come to her aid one day.

Yes, one day, he vowed to himself, he’d be strong enough to be her strength.

A young woman had lost all hope.

Up until a year ago, she'd been happy. Although she'd never been rich, she had been content with her life. She had kind parents, reliable friends, and a loving fiancé.

However, her whole life crumbled around her in the span of one single day. She was attacked by monsters. She sustained injuries that left her unable to walk, and a horrible scar marred the beautiful face she'd always been proud of.

After that, nothing was the same anymore. The people around her started treating her differently, and her fiancé left her.

She cursed God; she cursed everything. Why did she have to go through something like this? Why had God given her this trial?

She despaired and started hating anything and everything.

A skilled healer could help her. While they wouldn't necessarily be able to fix her completely, they would definitely be able to improve her condition. Unfortunately, hiring such a healer required funds, and her family didn't have that kind of money.

If I have to keep living like this...I might as well be dead, the girl thought.

One fateful day, though, the clouds that darkened her life were easily swept away.

It was all thanks to Ellize, the saint, who'd happened to pass through her tiny village. Her magic and healing powers were beyond logic, and she healed the young woman's face and legs in the blink of an eye. She didn't ask for thanks, let alone money. She simply left—as if what she'd just done was the most natural thing in the world.

Thus, the young woman went after her and asked, "Why did you save me? You didn't gain anything from this!"

The saint turned toward her with a smile so beautiful that anyone, including girls, would have fallen for her the moment they saw it. "My hands aren't very large, you see," she started. "No matter what I do, some lives will slip through

my fingers. So I want to at least help the people I can reach. And... I did gain something from helping you. Getting to see your smile is more than enough to fill my heart with joy.”

Even though life is painful, I hope you will never lose hope. Keep facing forward—I want you to live with everything you have and be happy.

The girl felt as though she’d heard the saint’s inner voice speak to her, and before she knew it, tears had welled up in her eyes.

She felt ashamed of the days she’d spent moping around and despairing. What a fool she’d been! Without a single attempt at trying to do anything, she’d simply given up and let hate and resentment consume her. Unlike the saint, she hadn’t given everything she had to try and make a change.

“Saint! One day...in the future...I promise to repay you! I will never forget what you did for me!”

She wouldn’t spend her days wasting away anymore. The saint had given her hope, a future! And she had every intention to dedicate this future to her.

She would do whatever she could to give back. From now on, she’d live for the saint.

The young man—Verner—had just lost everything he held dear.

He drifted through the forest, his eyes lifeless and cold. Eventually, he tripped over a withered branch and fell. For a moment, he wondered if he’d just die like this, in this forest. It would be for the best, he thought. Maybe death would set him free. It wasn’t like anything or anyone would mourn him even if he perished.

However, Verner remained alive. No matter how much he walked, no matter how many days passed without eating anything, he couldn’t die; the strange power of darkness that had taken up residence in his body wouldn’t let him.

Ever since his powers had awoken, a black miasma continuously escaped his body, and plants would wither away with the lightest contact.

Verner had originally been the eldest son of a noble family who ruled over the

land. He'd been expected to take over his father's role eventually and lived happily, surrounded by many.

However, on his fourteenth birthday, dark powers erupted from within him without warning and he destroyed the entire mansion. He didn't know why it had happened. He had no way to understand any of it. How could a regular teenager notice that a part of the witch's soul had entered his body?

The only thing he knew was that he wielded the same powers as the hateful witch, and that fact changed the attitudes of everyone around him.

"Monster! You're not my child!"

"We cannot let such an abomination stay here!"

"Get out of here, monster!"

"Get lost! You're one of the witch's servants, aren't you?!"

No one needed him. They all wanted him to die. The fourteen-year-old boy wasn't strong enough to bear it.

Eventually, even his tears ran dry, and he lost the will to walk. As he stopped, a dark shadow suddenly appeared in front of him. He didn't have any energy left to worry about it.

"Found you... Here to...guide...you. The witch...awaits..." the black shadow said, holding out a hand toward Verner.

He had a feeling that, if he took that hand, he'd never be able to turn back. He knew that, yet he didn't have the strength to resist. He couldn't bring himself to care about anything anymore.

But the next moment, someone suddenly stepped in between the shadow and himself and attacked the former with a strong ray of light.

"You— Who are...?! " the shadow started.

"Disappear, shadow. I won't stand by and let you lure this poor boy into heresy."

"Are you...the saint?! Be damned... How dare you...stand in my way! But this strength... I can't...face...her..." it muttered before disappearing as quickly as it

had appeared.

The saint—the shadow had indeed recognized her—slowly turned to face Verner.

When he gazed upon her face, his first thought was that she was beautiful. Every ray of light that made it through the shade of the trees seemed to belong on her face. It was as if light existed for her sake.

“Are you all right?” she asked him with a smile.

Words he didn’t even mean spilled from his lips, and he found he was unable to stop himself. “You should have left me be...”

No! That’s not what I should be saying!

The saint’s expression didn’t budge. She simply looked at him calmly.

“You shouldn’t have saved me,” Verner continued. “I should’ve just died. No one would’ve been sad if I’d disappeared, so you might as well have let the shadow take me away and kill me...”

She hadn’t asked him anything about that, yet he continued to blurt out complaint upon complaint. “You’d never understand. You’re the saint! How could you ever understand my feelings? How could you know what it’s like to be filthy and worthless?! Even dung on the side of the road has more use than me. No one could ever understand how I feel! I have no future, so what’s the point of living any longer?!”

Without realizing it, he’d started screaming at the saint. He was consumed by the jealousy he felt. She was the saint—humanity’s hope, someone everyone adored. And he was...nothing like her. His envy had made him voice the thoughts he’d never wanted to utter.

For better or worse, her beautiful green eyes compelled him to admit his true feelings. He felt like screaming the thoughts he had kept buried deep inside his heart to the world.

“I can’t know what others would feel, but I would be sad if you died,” she answered simply.

As he continued to look into her eyes, Verner was astonished. A single tear

rolled down her cheek.

Even though it was the very first time they'd met, she cried for him. Him, a cursed, useless boy. Her heart ached for him. To Verner, it was the greatest salvation of all.

He felt something...plush and soft pressing against him. It had taken him way too long to notice that the saint was hugging him!

"And you're neither filthy nor worthless," she added.

A dam broke, and Verner burst out crying.

Ever since his powers had awoken, he'd been treated like a piece of trash everywhere he went. He'd been called unsightly, filthy, repulsive, abominable, even. No one wanted to get close to him, let alone touch him. And yet, the saint hadn't hesitated to embrace him.

He closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling for a moment...before suddenly trying to push her away.

"No! Don't!" he cried. "You can't touch me! You'll... Just get away from me!"

The miasma that was overflowing from his body didn't heed his words; it ate at everything around him. Hugging someone was just foolish given his condition.

He panicked and tried to get away from the saint, but she patted his back as if to soothe him.

"It's all right. Don't worry, I'm fine. This power will help you one day. But I understand how much it must make you suffer right now... So I will borrow some of it, all right?" she said, absorbing the miasma that had been tormenting Verner into her own body.

The boy couldn't believe it. He had suffered so much because of his power, but now he was able to control it without any issue.

She truly is the saint, he thought.

"Please don't give up on your own happiness. You will face plenty of trials, but...I hope you'll reach your happy ending. No, I'll make sure of it," she told him.

He thought he heard her whisper at the end, “Even if I have to tear down my own body in the process...”

She let go, took a step back, and smiled at him. She had a strange charisma that compelled Verner to trust her unconditionally. He wanted to believe that there was light at the end of every tunnel.

The saint took out a chain with a little pendant and put it around Verner’s neck.



“What is it...?” the boy asked.

“It will prevent your powers from escaping your body. And...I added a little good luck charm too.”

“A good luck charm?”

“Yes. One that will help you reach your happy ending. I wished for you to encounter your saint. Don’t worry, you will definitely be happy,” she explained before flying away.

Verner’s eyes followed her silhouette until she disappeared in the distance. He grasped the pendant tightly.

The hesitant young man he had been a few moments ago was nowhere to be seen. A newfound strength dwelled in his eyes, and the air around him felt fresher and sweeter than ever. While the world around him had once seemed grim to him, he now saw beauty in everything. The light had found its way into his heart, and everything shone under it.

I wished for you to encounter your saint, she had said.

Verner was certain she meant he would eventually meet a lovely girl who’d accept him, but...he’d never accept another saint. Even if his feelings would never reach her, he wanted to see her again. He wanted to be by her side.

He decided the pendant he had received would be the proof of that vow. It would lead him to her once more.

I will see her again.

With that thought inside his heart, Verner decided to believe in her light, no matter what the future might hold. He’d resolved never to stray from that path, never to stray from the light.

Ellize was nothing but a fake. However, to the people she had saved, she was—without a shadow of a doubt—the real deal.

Chapter 2: A Shift in the Story

Sometimes, I'd suddenly notice that I was in the middle of a dream. This was one of those times.

I was inside my oh-so-familiar apartment, with my oh-so-familiar mediocre looks. My body felt light—*way* too light. It wasn't natural.

Yup, definitely a dream.

Oh, and something else was strange—I was having an out-of-body experience. Like, I could see myself as if I was floating over my body. Then again, I guess dreams were usually strange like that.

Even though it wasn't real, I figured I might as well enjoy my return to normalcy. My body was just staring off into space with a dumb expression, so I took control of it and turned on my computer.

The very first thing I did was open the official website of *Kuon no Sanka*; I just *had* to.

You might've been wondering why. Well, the reason was very simple—I could see the date on the corner of my screen, and it just so happened to be the day the character popularity ranking had been uploaded. Even if I *were* inside a dream, I just had to know the results! Needless to say, I had voted for my lovely Eterna.

I hope she gets first place...

When I opened the page, though, what I saw was seriously shocking.

The first is...Marie, huh? Frustrating, but fair enough.

Marie was a kuudere—an ice queen, but a huge softie on the inside—and the most popular character. There was always a second lead that ended up being more popular than the heroine, right?

The second place went to Eterna. I was a bit sad that she hadn't managed to snatch the top spot, but it was still a good ranking. I just hoped she'd do even

better next time if another contest was organized.

Third place... All right.

Fourth place... Yeah, sure.

Fifth place... Ellize?! What the hell?!

No way... There's no way in hell she got fifth!!! Just what kind of freak would even vote for her?! Why?! Just why?!

Ellize was supposed to be universally hated, the target of hate campaigns. She was, like, *the* textbook case of a detestable villain and a huge pile of turds. She was the worst piece of shit in the world, even! It made no sense for her to rank fifth!

While I was freaking out, I scrolled down all the way to the comments.

Ellize is such a saint!

I know, right? Even holier than the original.

And prettier...

Give us an Ellize route, c'mon!

Ellize, my goddess!!!

No route and she's fifth... Go for it, Miss (true) Saint!

The best part of the game.

Ellize's too pure for this world.

She's supposed to be a fake saint, right? Makes sense—she's no saint, she's an outright goddess!

Fuuuuuuuckkkkk!!! Only fifth place?!

I swear, the lack of Ellize route makes this game shit.

Let's face it, she's the real saint. Eterna did nothing but steal her spotlight. What a saint... lol.

>Can you go shit on the other girls somewhere else, asshole?

>You don't need to diss Eterna to praise your waifu!

>Go kill yourself!

Ellize's the only one worthy of being called a saint!

Huh??? Is there...something wrong with my eyes??? These comments just don't make any sense.

Ellize's story went as follows: Before the game's events, she was switched with Eterna at birth, claimed the other girl's position, and did whatever the hell she wanted until everyone hated the saint. Even after the main story began, she continued to pull shit, and almost every player hated her guts. She finally got what was coming toward the end, and everyone rejoiced. She was even more of a villain than the witch.

There's no way in hell anyone could mistake her intentions and write posts like that. What's going on?! Wait, is it April Fools' Day? Yeah, no. It's not the first of April. I'm so confused. Why?! How?!

I had no clue what the hell was going on, so I looked up Ellize's name and clicked on her wiki page.

Ellize

Profile:

A non-dateable character of the game *Kuon no Sanka*.

Ellize is referred to as the saint. She's proficient in magic and swordplay and is one of the most powerful characters in the game.

When she was a child, she was selfish and often acted up, but after realizing the error of her ways, she changes altogether and decides to devote her life to helping others.

Ellize rises as the symbol of light to oppose the witch, the grim symbol of darkness. She often helps the player in times of need.

At the start of the story, she helps the fourteen-year-old Verner control his powers and gives him a pendant. This event becomes a turning point for him.

However, absorbing part of his powers shortens Ellize's life. As a result, her body also stops growing. This is the reason why she always looks fourteen.

Ellize refuses to abandon even the smallest village and rushes to battle monsters wherever they appear. She also heals everyone she comes across, no matter who they are.

Even though Ellize is a flawless saint, she's not the real one of *Kuon no Sanka*. As a child, she was mistaken for Eterna. In truth, she's only a commoner. As a result, she's unable to defeat the witch. Still, her holy behavior makes her a true saint in the hearts of her followers, and even the witch recognizes her as one.

As for Ellize herself, she's aware of her situation from the very start, and she's ready to return Eterna's rightful spot to her at any time.

Game events:

Ellize is a non-dateable character, but she appears in every route to help the player.

- In all routes:

Meets Verner at fourteen.

•In Eterna's route:

Appears at the magic academy, and...

While I was looking at Ellize's page, my vision started getting blurry.

Uh oh. I'm gonna wake up...

I could hear birds chirping around me.

Hang on! Hold the phone! Show me the reeeest! What happens at the magic academy?! "She appears and..." what?! I need to know now! Hey! C'moooooon! Daaaaaamn it!!!

And there I was, lying awake.

Argh. The morning sun's way too effing bright.

I got up, stretched a little, walked to the mirror, and freshened up a little.

Perfect, I thought, looking smugly at myself. I was just as pretty as I was an asshole.

In the original game, Ellize would've already been already a big fatso from overeating, but I was different. I exercised regularly (by killing monsters), so I was still a slim beauty. My hair and skin were glowing too. Okay, there weren't really any hair or skin care products in this world, so I had to cheat a little by using magic, but that was my little secret.

I was already seventeen, but my looks hadn't changed one bit since I was fourteen. I could only assume my cells had gone crazy after being forced to withstand the dark powers (lol) of the main character.

All right. It's finally time for the main story to start.

My objective hadn't changed. I was going to make sure Verner was on Eterna's route and help them reach a happy ending. Once I got to witness the grand finale... Well, I guessed it'd be time for me to make my exit. I'd kill myself to ensure that the real Ellize would never regain control over her body and mess everything up.

Plan B was to get myself exiled after revealing I was nothing but a fake, then

spend the rest of my life taking it easy somewhere very, very far away.

To be honest, I wasn't all that scared of death. People often feared it because they didn't know what awaited them. I was pretty sure everyone had freaked out at the thought of fading into an endless slumber at least a few times.

On the other hand, if everyone knew with certainty that a paradise for NEETs existed—one where you never had to work another day in your life—then the number of people who feared their mortality would get cut by half in one go.

I knew that the world of *Kuon no Sanka* had an afterlife. That was why I couldn't care less if my life span was shorter now that I'd taken over a part of Verner's darkness. Actually, playing the role of the saint was incredibly tiring, so I wasn't against kicking the bucket soon and taking it easy in NEET paradise.

Wait... What do I do if I end up in hell, though? Oh well, that's a worry for another day! Let's go over my plans from now on instead.

After our encounter, Verner had reached the village where Eterna lived without issues. The two of them were now seventeen and set to enter the magic academy. There, they would train to become magic knights. All in all, everything was proceeding as it was supposed to.

The magic academy's main goal was to foster knights that would be able to face the monsters and the witch. The best students were chosen to join the saint's personal guard.

Sounds like more of a punishment than a reward if you ask me, but yeah.

In the game, neither Verner nor Eterna had aimed for these spots. Well, duh! Obviously! The saint was a true piece of shit, and everyone across the country knew it. Who'd want to serve *her*?

The two of them had only entered the academy because they wanted to become strong enough to fight monsters.

However, Verner's protagonist charm had played against him, and he'd ended up catching Ellize's attention. From that point onward, she'd tried everything to get him to join her personal guard. When things hadn't gone her way, she'd snapped and decided to harass him instead. Naturally, she hadn't stopped at that either—she'd also bullied the girls that were close to him.

Damn, can't you just drop dead, you fake? Oh, wait—that's me now.

Anyway, that was how the fake saint led many of the heroines to despair.

In other words, my main objective was to avoid doing anything dumb to avoid repeating that. Step two involved helping out the girls whenever I could so they'd be even happier.

And so, I found myself at the academy after I'd been invited to visit.

I was observing the new students and thinking about how cool their uniform was—sort of like a British military uniform from the seventeenth century. Well, minus the military orders and weapons, I mean. The boys wore a black uniform, adorned with blue accents, while the girls wore white with touches of green.

It's a bit surprising—none of them wear red.

"I would now like to invite Ellize, the holy saint, to give a speech to our new students."

Oh, is it my turn? What do I tell them?

I was asked to do this every year, so I was starting to run out of ideas.

The original Ellize used to blurt out crap like, "Do try your best to catch my attention, peasants!" and "I'm the law here!" Obviously, her reputation had already been at rock bottom, but it never stopped her from trying to drag it even further down. She'd even had people expelled for the awful crime of...looking awkward...and other stupid reasons.

She's the absolute worst...and I never understood why she always tried so hard to get everyone else to hate her. Oh, this isn't the time to get sidetracked; I need to go give my speech. What should I say...?



This was the Training Institute for Magic Knights of Alfreia—also known colloquially as the magic academy. Although the word "academy" wasn't in the institute's official name, everyone called it that regardless.

It was named after the very first saint, Alfreia, and imposed harsh training on its students. Those who managed to overcome its grueling regimen would go on to become glorious knights. Furthermore, the top students would be given the

honor of joining the saint's guard. Many saw this opportunity as their gateway to success.

These students—young hopefuls aspiring to become magic knights—hailed from all over the world. At the academy, they would train to become strong enough to join humanity's force in the brewing war.

While Alfreea was a training institute, the newcomers were brought into a gigantic chapel on their first day. The walls and ceiling shone with many colors—white, blue, red, yellow, green—and gave the place a solemn, grand atmosphere.

It was the students' big day. It was as much a reward for their past efforts as it was a new beginning. They had all overcome obstacles and difficult training to claim their spot in this school, but that hadn't marked the end of their trials—now they'd have to compete against others who were just as talented and hardworking.

As such, the fledglings felt a mixture of emotions. They were highly motivated, of course, but most of them were still anxious.

And among these students was Verner.

"The atmosphere here really is something else..."

Magic knights were the sword and shield of humanity, the ones chosen to rise up against the witch and fight alongside the saint. Everyone would laud their courage and admire them.

Therefore, the qualifications to become one weren't easy. Only a tenth of the newcomers would pull through and become knights; the rest would end up in lower positions, destined to serve those above them. Around thirty percent of soldiers were people who had once dreamed of becoming knights, but failed. Getting a spot in the saint's guard was even harder—only a select few were allowed to remain close to her.

Naturally, Verner was gunning for one of those spots. Ever since that fateful day when the saint, Ellize, had saved him, he'd dreamed of fighting by her side.

He had already lost everything once and given up on the world. However, right as he'd thought everything was lost, Ellize had embraced him. She'd cast a

blinding light upon his dark and miserable existence. The young man had made up his mind there and then—he'd never give in to the dark ever again. He'd just follow along the path of light she had shown him.

He had never let go of the pendant she'd given him, not even once. And now, his dream was finally within grasp.

While Verner was lost in thought, a young girl, Eterna, who hailed from the same village as him, gazed at his face. Her expression was unreadable.

"You look happy, Ver," she said.

"Was I that obvious?" he replied. "I'm really no good, aren't I? I've barely reached the starting point, so I need to brace myself for what's to come! I can't allow myself to become complacent just because I've finally reached her. Just wait—I'll become strong enough to stay by her side."

Eterna was a young girl who had grown up in the very same village Verner had settled in after he'd been driven out of his home. She had lustrous silver hair and was known as the greatest beauty of the village—indeed, what a beauty she was. She'd grown up in a poor village where it was unthinkable to waste resources taking care of one's hair or skin, but her natural charm shone through regardless. With a bit of grooming, she'd be on par with Ellize, the renowned saint.

The only man the dazzling Eterna was interested in was Verner. Although they had only known each other for three years, she had seen him grow up from a boy to a man. Although she couldn't have said whether she was in love with him or simply treasured him as a friend, it was pretty much common sense in their village that boys and girls of similar age who got along well eventually married. Thus, ever since they'd met, Eterna had always figured she and Verner would eventually end up together.

She wasn't opposed to the idea, but the issue was Verner. He only had eyes for someone else—someone very, very far away from the two of them.

"There are so many people..." Eterna noted, looking around.

"The competition will be harsh," Verner agreed.

Indeed, there were plenty of wannabe knights. Such had always been the

case, but in recent years, the number of applicants had reached a new high. The reason behind this was quite simple: they were motivated by Ellize, the greatest saint in history...or so the rumor claimed.

Among them, there was a soldier who'd seen her wield her magic on the battlefield and save lives. He'd decided to train harder than ever to enter the academy. Over there, a young girl, whose face and leg had been healed by Ellize, had become an expert archer and wanted nothing more than to repay her debt. Finally, there was a boy who'd given up on everything before seeing the saint's light, and had vowed to go through the doors of the academy as soon as he could.

Besides those three, hundreds of others had been saved by the saint, either directly or indirectly... And that was without accounting for the countless others who'd seen her good deeds from afar.

All these young people had been inspired by her courage and devotion. Never before had there been so many knight applicants.

"I would now like to invite Ellize, the holy saint, to give a speech to our new students."

It was time for the one who had started this new era—aka the greatest saint in history—to take the stage.

She was so lovely that anyone would be captivated at first sight. Her golden hair—which tumbled down all the way to her waist—bounced with every step, her smooth porcelain skin glowed under the light, and her eyes shone like jewels. Her pure white dress suited her so well that it looked like it had been personally tailored for her, and the matching white flower that decorated her locks only further enhanced her charm.

Ellize had escaped the curse of aging. She would forever retain the youthfulness of a fourteen-year-old; she looked the same as when Verner had first met her. The flow of time itself bowed down to the living miracle that was the saint. To think that not even time could make her grandeur wither away, the new students thought, transfixed by her appearance.

A voice, clear as the bell of a church, began to speak, to the delight of the freshmen's ears. "First of all, let me congratulate all of you for overcoming this

institution's difficult examination. You have earned your place here thanks to your efforts." However, her next words were completely unexpected for everyone in the room. "Sadly—and I must apologize for shattering your dreams—being a knight is not the glorious and honorable position you imagine. A knight must fight on the front line. They face death every day, and most of them do not make it past one year. And, although a select lucky few may accomplish something with their death...most will lose their life for nothing. People are quick to laud a knight's honorable sacrifice, but you must know the truth—oftentimes, you and your peers will die a meaningless death. Honorable in name...but tragically useless."

The saint, the very person they swore to protect, was giving them a disapproving speech.

Still, she was simply stating the truth—knightdom wasn't the valiant, dazzling position they thought it was. It was hard, unrewarding work, and they could all very well die a dog's death.

"I hope you will once again reflect very deeply before continuing on this path," she continued. "Ask yourself if you're truly all right with everything I've just told you. Ask yourself if you're ready to throw your life away to protect a saint you do not know. As for me, I'd be much happier if I knew you were alive and well with your families, protecting them instead... Your lives should not be sacrificed for a single person. No life, and certainly not my own, is worth that much."

Knights were meant to be the sword and shield of the saint. Her existence was their *raison d'être*. They were sacrificial pawns, used to keep the saint in perfect condition so she would be able to battle the witch at her best. Regardless of how the job might've been dressed up, there was no changing the fact that they were mere substitutes who had to die in place of the saint; she simply wasn't afraid to put it bluntly.

Verner couldn't stop himself from smiling at her words. She truly hadn't changed one bit. He knew everything she'd said was the truth, and he was more than ready. He'd accepted all of that long before coming here.

Even though it obviously benefited the saint to have as many shields around

as possible for her safety, she couldn't accept it. That was why she'd tried her hardest to deter prospective knights. If she ended up alone, she'd probably try to fight the witch all on her own without asking anyone for help.

Verner knew what she was like, and it only fueled his desire to protect her. He wasn't the only one—everyone in the room was of the same mind.

“Fighting monsters isn't the only way to resist. Protecting your families, bringing children into this world, and raising them with love... Those are also wonderful ways to fight. If you can accomplish that, you will have already done much more good than I ever could. Are you truly certain you wish to devote your lives to becoming knights? I beg all of you to reconsider.”

With those words, Ellize's welcome speech—which sounded more like a farewell speech—came to an end. Even so, the people sitting in the room didn't waver in the slightest; no one got up to leave.

They had all prepared themselves before setting foot in the academy.

They knew their death would amount to nothing, that they would be lumped in with the rest of the deceased and praised with empty words. So what? It didn't matter if they couldn't change anything by themselves; they'd protect the saint with numbers.

In the end, while Ellize's speech confused a few students, including Eterna, it only strengthened the resolve of the others. They were more fired up than ever.

Chapter 3: Verner's Going Off Course

Aaaaaaaargh, I can't take this anymore! Why're they all so motivated to get themselves killed?! I was pretty clear, wasn't I? You're a bunch of weaklings, so it doesn't really matter if you jump to your death or not! It won't change a single thing! Why don't you get it?!

The best they could do was yell and moan before dropping dead in the background while the main character and his party did the actual fighting. They'd be more useful hiding out in the countryside and focusing on farming or something.

I'd even been nice enough to sugarcoat everything and talk about their families and having babies to contribute to society and stuff. So how come not even a single one of them went home?!

Give me a break, you nameless mob!

At the end of the day, knights were nothing more than human shields for the saint. It just so happened that I did *not* need any.

You guys know I can fly, right?! How the hell do you even intend to protect me like that?! By running around uselessly on the ground while I'm in the air? You'll just be a hindrance! Damn, this is so depressing.

Despite being a piece of shit, I still felt a *little* guilty at the idea of sending hundreds of people to their death for no reason. Somewhere deep, *deep* down, I'd feel...a bit bad about it. Probably.

Nah, okay, I lied. I probably wouldn't give a shit.

It'd most likely be the same as hearing that some random people I'd never met had died in some random accident in some random prefecture halfway across the country. I'd think, "oh no, that's sad" for like two seconds, then go on with my life without even remembering their names. By the following day, I'd probably forget it happened altogether.

Yeah, I pretty much felt the same about all these nameless, wannabe knights,

which made their inevitable death even more sad. They'd become cannon fodder for someone who couldn't even be bothered to remember them. What a waste.

Either way, I couldn't just keep on moping in a corner. There were plenty of events waiting to be triggered inside the academy.

Even if I were to just stay put, Verner would handle most of them in the blink of an eye. He'd get all the heroines to fall for him. There were a few events I couldn't just ignore. Depending on the main character's choices, some heroines would meet a grim end—they'd become unhappy, or worse, lose their lives.

Then again, I guess even if you only pick good options, people tend to drop like flies in this game.

I wouldn't have needed to intervene if Verner could manage to fix everything on his own, but some of the answers were just completely illogical; no one in their right mind would pick them on their first run. Some options were even hidden until your later runs and couldn't be picked at all! That meant that some girls were just doomed from the start—at least in the first run.

Yes, I'm talking about you, Eterna.

No matter how you played, Eterna was bound to become the last boss in the first playthrough. This being said, she still died in the good ending of her route anyway.

Isn't my baby super pitiful? There were also other girls who died no matter what, unless you were on their route. *Like the witch, or...the witch...or...only the witch, I guess.*

Speaking about characters who were bound to die, Farah—a hot teacher with huge melons—also always died on the first run. For some reason, she'd try to assassinate Eterna, so Verner would have to step in. After their fight, she'd suddenly have a change of heart, apologize, and jump off a cliff.

If you played the game a second time, you'd have the option of taking Eterna with you to go confront Farah (the first time around, Verner insisted it wasn't a good idea since Eterna was her target). Thanks to Eterna's powers, you'd then discover that Farah was just a poor victim that had been brainwashed by the

witch, and she'd undo the spell.

If you went through this sequence of events, the characters would also discover much faster that Eterna had been the real saint all along, and they get a chance to drag Ellize down. That was how you avoided Eterna's eventual fall into despair later on.

All in all, the event was crucial. If everything went well, Farah wouldn't have to die, and Eterna wouldn't join the dark side.

Hang on... I just realized something. If the witch is targeting Eterna this early on, it must mean that she knows she's the true saint, right? I guess it makes sense for the witch to notice—she's also fated to face the saint, after all. Then again, everyone probably should've noticed much faster considering Ellize's behavior...

For the time being, it'd be better if I assumed that the witch knew I wasn't the real deal. Farah's brainwashing incident would soon break the news to everyone else, but I figured it wouldn't be an issue. I wasn't Ellize, and I hadn't been going around doing horrible things. If anything, I'd done nothing but *good* deeds to make sure Eterna's reputation would be safe. At this point, I was fairly sure no one would end up attacking her village in retaliation after she regained her rightful place.

Still, I'd keep an eye out for dumbasses planning attacks just in case.

The good thing was that I knew when Farah would try to attack Eterna. I'd just have to step in and inform everyone that Farah was being controlled to save the day!

HA HA HA! Easy as pie. I can go enjoy a nice bath now.

All right, so, after I'd enjoyed a lovely bath and thought it over once again... I realized that the situation might've been a *liiiiittle* more desperate than I'd initially assumed. I know it was sudden, but I'd finally noticed that there were critical flaws in my "play matchmaker for Verner and Eterna and watch my girl get the happy ending she deserves" plan.

First, I wasn't a student at the magic academy. Most of the events would take

place there, which meant I couldn't observe them in real time.

I mean... It seemed obvious in hindsight. The magic academy was a place to foster magic knights to serve the saint. There was no way the saint—or, uh, the fake one in my case—could just study there too!

You might've been wondering...how I was supposed to learn stuff, then? One-on-one lessons with a renowned private teacher, obviously! Actually, my lessons weren't really one-on-one. Dozens of teachers dedicated most of their time to me.

The saint was even more important than royalty in this world!

Before a new saint was born, a shady prophet would make a divination and warn the elites. They'd start getting all hyped up, pinpoint the expecting family, and prepare to steal the baby—I mean, uh...*convince* the family to give them the child for the greater good.

They usually threw huge sums at the families, so most didn't fight too hard to keep their newborn child.

You might've been thinking it was heartless of them to give up their baby for money, but many families in this world were still desperate to have one less mouth to feed. They'd abandon or sell babies if they had to, so very few people would refuse large sums when offered them.

I also had no idea where Ellize's parents were or what they were doing. According to the official booklet, they never felt guilty for giving Ellize up and spent their days enjoying their wealth.

The apple never falls far from the tree...

After being taken away from her parents, the saint would be raised like a sheltered little princess in the saint's castle, which was situated at the border between the most powerful countries. All of this was done to avoid a single country from gaining too much influence over the saint.

Every country would send their knights, teachers, and servants to take care of the saint and raise her. I did think it was a bit sad that saints never had proper parent figures, but I supposed it had to do with the way the people regarded them. They had a very religious approach to it all, and viewed the saint as a

figure who had descended again with a different appearance, rather than a newborn human who *also* happened to be the saint. As such, the saint was never really treated like a child, and her words held more power than those of any king or queen.

All in all, it was completely impossible for me to just enter the academy. The best I could do was to time my visits well and pretend I wanted to “observe” the students for a while... Which led me to my second issue: I had a general idea of the timing of the game’s events, but I didn’t know the exact dates.

There was a precise dating system in *Kuon no Sanka* which, conveniently enough, was almost the exact same as the Gregorian calendar.

C’mon, staff, that’s too lazy!

The only difference was that the days of the week were named after seven of the eight attributes of this world. Starting with Sunday, which was Lightday, the days were as follows: Iceday, Fireday, Waterday, Windday, Thunderday, and finally Earthday.

Poor darkness, it must’ve been so sad to be left out.

Darkness was very much linked to the witch in everyone’s collective psyche. They probably avoided using it for that reason.

You might’ve been thinking, “Gee! Given there’s a mighty convenient dating system and all, *why* don’t you know the dates of any events?!” Well, the thing was...events could be pushed back or pulled forward depending on Verner’s actions.

Kuon no Sanka was a game in which you trained Verner daily through school activities. Events were sprinkled in here and there based on your stats and choice of activity. For instance, an event that happened on May 2 could very well fall on May 4 in another playthrough because you did something differently. If you wasted too much time on something completely irrelevant plot-wise, the events could end up being pushed back by literal weeks.

So, in conclusion... I had no way of knowing when Verner would trigger the events.

My original plan was to step in right as Farah tried to attack Eterna so I could

save both of them, but I couldn't know when that would happen exactly.

The worst-case scenario would be Verner spending all of his time training alone, resulting in nothing ever happening at all.

Each day was separated into five segments—morning, noon, afternoon, evening, and night. That meant you had to pick actions—independent training, studying, talking to one of the girls, etc.—to fill these slots. No matter what you picked, the flow of time would be the same.

So if you decided to mess around and filled each slot every day with training and never talked to anyone, you'd eventually end up with a solo ending.

I was *pretty* sure Verner wouldn't do something that random, though.

Since I'd taken over Ellize, it might've been possible to avoid Eterna joining the dark side even if Farah ended up dying. After all, Ellize was always the main reason why Eterna's life became so messed up. While Farah's event served to hasten *Ellize's* fall, it didn't have any real influence on Eterna herself.

Still, I wanted Farah to survive if I could do anything about it. She was an *importit* character in the game—and one with a great rack at that. It'd be a shame for them to disappear into oblivion.

Farah was a beautiful twenty-four-year-old woman with wavy brown hair. Her features were somewhat sharp and...oh yeah, did I mention her impressive F cups? Total. Bombshell.

She was one of the girls I wanted to save—no, scratch “wanted.” I *was* going to save her. That way, I could continue to enjoy looking at the beautiful sights.

Even without knowing when the event would start, I still had a way out. I'd just have to investigate! I'd go to the academy to observe and ask the teachers about Verner and Eterna.

I had played *Kuon no Sanka* over and over again and cleared every single route. I could gauge where Verner was in the game by his attitude in class, what he'd been up to recently, the way people spoke about him, or even the amount of people who knew about him. I didn't even need to check out the guides to know the heroines' affection level, so I would definitely manage.

All righties! Now that everything's settled, time for another relaxing bath!

Uh oh... I'm in deep shit.

I'd gone to the academy under the premise that I wanted to observe the students, but after I'd had a little chat with the teachers, I realized all over again that life wasn't easy.

The situation was just unfathomable.

Besides Eterna, all of the other heroine's affection levels were at zero. *ZERO!* And even Eterna was still at the initial default value! Verner hadn't triggered any events yet. *NOT A SINGLE ONE!* The sub heroines didn't even know Verner's name yet!

All Verner had spent his days doing was training. Morning? Training! Noon? Training! Afternoon? Still training! Evening and night? *More. Freaking. Training!*

What the hell is he doing?! I can't believe this! What's wrong with you, Verner?! How the hell did you manage to avoid triggering any events?! Do you never talk to anyone?! Daaaaamn iiit! He just spends all of his free time doing independent training! My boy's speedrunning the solo ending! No way!

Wait, wait. Let's calm down for a minute, here. Look, Verner, I know you're not aware of the situation, but Kuon no Sanka is a dating sim, all right? You're supposed to DATE PEOPLE!

Sure, the gaming system allowed you to train and join battles, but that was only an added bonus to spice up the game a little. The main point was to *actually* date the girls.

I wanted him to go with the Eterna route—actually, I wasn't about to let him do anything else—but I just couldn't believe he simply hadn't talked to *anyone*, let alone gotten any of the other girls to like him.

What kind of dating sim protagonist spends his time training 24-7, followed by an extra side of training?! You're gonna end up alone before you know it, I'm telling you!

The last illustration of his solo ending had a muscular Verner surrounded by a

bunch of brawny men with a caption that read, “No need for women when I can dominate the world with my might!” Everyone referred to it as the bodybuilding♂ ending. What a joke.

By the way, on the topic of speedrunning...this ending was the fastest one to get, so most of the people who tried RTA—real-time attack—went with it. There were plenty of videos online. I remembered having a blast watching them.

It was fun watching them on my screen, but I’m not letting this fly here. Don’t fuck with me, Verner. Why are you trying to get the freaking bodybuilding♂ ending?! Are you a speedrunner at heart, huh?! Is that it?! Were you possessed by some weird spirit? Did you reincarnate like me? Are you trying to clear the game and go home?!

Either way, I was in a pickle. If Verner didn’t make a move, nothing would happen.

Aaah... I really don’t wanna do this, but it doesn’t look like I have any choice, do I? I need to talk to him directly to understand why he’s goofing around.



Verner had a dream.

One day, he wanted to stand by the saint—the one who had brought light into his life when he was at his lowest, who had saved him from his own darkness.

That was why he’d decided to walk the same path as her. He believed that by going down the very same path of light, he could repay his debt. And, to do so, he couldn’t afford to make any detours. He didn’t have time to waste on meaningless things!

Every single second of every day, he was devoted to bettering himself for the sole sake of his goal. He wouldn’t allow himself to waver.

“One thousand four hundred five! One thousand four hundred six! One thousand four hundred seven! One thousand four hundred eight! One thousand four hundred nine! One thousand four hundred ten!”

Verner was inside the room that had been allocated to him by the academy, doing sit-ups by suspending his upper-half over the upper level of the triple bunk bed.

A knight needed a strong body, so he was working on building his core muscles. If you gave the same sword to a scrawny boy and a built man, the latter would obviously do more damage.

Muscles never betrayed you.

Right now, Verner was alone inside his room. He did share it with others, but they were busy frolicking with girls or hanging out with their friends.

“One thousand four hundred eleven! One thousand four hundred twelve! One thousand four hundred thirteen! One thousand four hundred fourteen! One thousand four hundred fifteen! One thousand four hundred sixteen!”

Time was very much finite, and Verner had *a lot* to do in that incredibly limited time. He had to build up his strength, practice his swordsmanship and magic, and much, much more.

Unless he became truly strong, he’d never get to stand by her side.

Eterna had been nagging him to open up to other things from time to time, but he was hellbent on following his path.

While he was immersed in his training, he suddenly heard someone knock softly at the door.

Who could it be? Eterna? No, she’d bang at the door without any reservations.

Verner had no choice but to take a break. He wiped off his sweat with a towel, put on a tank top, and opened the door. As soon as he did, though, he froze on the spot.

“Hmm... We met once a long time ago, do you remember me?” the person on the other side of the door asked.

WHAAAAAAT?!

Every nerve in Verner’s body was screaming.

In front of him was the saint—the very person he’d dreamed about seeing again for so long! Verner was at a loss. He was only wearing his uniform pants and a tank top! He never would’ve expected the saint to show up at his door like this—not even in his wildest dreams—so he’d opened the door in his sloppy get-up. If he’d known, he would’ve groomed himself properly!

“L-Lady Ellize! O-Of course I remember! I’ve never forgotten you! Not even for a moment!” Verner’s voice was a bit shaky, but he managed to speak nonetheless.

Was his voice too high-pitched because he was nervous? Oh no, it definitely was! He was in the middle of training...did he smell like sweat? He definitely did, didn’t he? He just wanted to die on the spot.

Two opposite feelings waged war inside him. He was overjoyed to finally talk to Ellize again, but at the same time, he couldn’t forgive himself for showing her such an unsightly appearance.

“H-H-How come you’re here, Lady Ellize?!”

“I came to inspect the academy, and while I was speaking with the teachers, I learned that the boy I’d met a few years ago was now a student here. I couldn’t help but wonder how you were doing these days. Am I bothering you?”

“O-Of course not!”

Bothering him?! Absolutely not! She was more than welcome. The only issue was that he’d been in the middle of training. Verner really wished he could’ve somehow predicted this! If he’d known, he would’ve groomed himself properly!

Ah, I just thought the exact same thing a minute ago, didn’t I?

Verner was very much aware that his brain was utterly confused and cycling through a loop.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Ellize said. “If I may, how have your powers been since then? I hope they didn’t give you trouble again.”

“N-No. Thanks to you, my powers have been stable, Lady Ellize. They’ve been acting up a little recently, but I’ve learned to control them... Really, it’s all thanks to you. I’m only alive and well because you were there to help me that

day,” Verner said, looking down at the saint.

She hadn’t grown one bit since the last time he’d met her, but he had. None of that could change his feelings, though. He still thought that her very existence was precious. If anything, he might’ve liked her even more than before.

Verner was hit by a sudden realization. *I exist for her sake. Nothing can ever change that.*

“Is that so?” Ellize answered with a soft smile. “Coming here today was very meaningful. I’m glad I got to see you.”

She looked up at Verner, and he couldn’t help but notice she seemed a little worried.

“You know,” she started again, “I heard you spend all of your time cooped up in your room engrossed in training. Training is good, but I believe you should open yourself to the world a little more and try to make friends. There are limits to what someone can do alone.”

“Limits to what I can do alone...” Verner repeated, looking at his own hands.

She was right—he only ever focused on himself. How could he hope to help others like that? The very reason he was here was to ensure the saint wouldn’t fight alone anymore. He’d stand by her side and fight with her.

If he continued training by himself like he had been, he’d be absolutely useless at working with others. A man like that wouldn’t be of any use to the saint.

“You’re right,” he said after a pause. “I thought everything would be fine if I just pushed forward in a straight line, but it looks like I was mistaken. I almost went down the wrong path once more.”

Verner obediently reflected on his mistakes before clenching his fists. Once again, she had shown him the right path. It was just like that time when he’d been about to go down the path of darkness, and she’d come to him. She’d cast her endless light on his path and showed him what he needed to do.

The boy remained silent, trying to take in everything she’d just said and

appreciating his luck. Just as he thought, she was his light. He wasn't scared of the darkness anymore. No matter what happened, she'd show him the way.

He'd never be able to protect anything if he grew complacent and happy with his own strength. Building up muscle for his own sake wouldn't help save anyone else; it'd be like putting on a meaningless show.

"Oh, I see you're still wearing the pendant I gave you," Ellize noted.

"Indeed. It's very precious to me. It's the symbol of my resolve, in a way," he answered, clutching his pendant like it was worth the world to him.

He leaned over to look Ellize in the eyes. Their reunion today had been completely unexpected. But now, everything was crystal clear for Verner—he knew what was precious to him and what he wanted to protect.

But he couldn't put it into words. Not yet... He was too weak and didn't deserve to.

He knew that, as he was, he was far from being a man worthy of her, so he decided to make a promise instead.

"Lady Ellize, you... On that day you saved my life and soul, so I'll use them to protect what's truly important to me. I'll become stronger. Strong enough to shield you one day..."

"What determination! I'm sure you'll be able to make every wish of yours come true," she answered with a smile. "Oh my, it looks like the others will be back soon. I should take my leave."

"I hope to see you again, Lady Ellize..."

Verner looked at her walking away.

I found my saint. No, I guess I never had to search for her in the first place—I already knew it was her from the moment we met. I'll become a man worthy of standing by her side, worthy of protecting her.

Verner was more determined than ever and ready to grow stronger.

Chapter 4: A Brand New Route

I immediately noticed something was off the second I opened my eyes.

Another dream?

Just like last time, I was looking down at my good old body, my previous incarnation—uh, that was how you were supposed to refer to your previous body, right?

My vision was all blurry, and I had a hard time moving. It felt like I was deep inside a pool.

I'd already spent twelve years as the shitty saint. Soon, I wouldn't be able to tell which was my real body anymore. Then again, maybe my life as Niito had always been a dream, and I'd been Ellize from the very start?

It didn't really matter. It's not like I had any way of knowing for sure, and there were more pressing things to worry about. Now that I was inside the same dream again, there were things I just *had* to check.

I needed to know what people were saying about Ellize online. I hadn't been able to read her whole wiki page last time.

All righties, time to get the old me moving!

I turned on my computer and typed “*Kuon no Sanka*” in the search bar. For some reason, only websites selling doujinshi popped up.

Oh jeez!

Because of the autocomplete, what I'd *actually* looked up was “*Kuon no Sanka* doujinshi tentacles.”

Uh oh! The search engine just snitched on me, didn't it? Now everyone's gonna know what kind of porn I usually look for!

Well, now that the secret's out, lemme tell you about my favorite thing to read—it's Eterna having a little “fun” with tentacles. There's just something about prim and proper girls getting...you know...by tentacles. Especially if they have a

holy or sacred air about them. Right?! Tentacles can just drag those kinda ladies down and sully 'em in a way humans couldn't even dream of. It just does it for me.

Since I'd looked it up anyway... I figured I might as well have a little fun. While my little Niito sadly hadn't followed me when I'd reincarnated, it was back in the dream. I figured shaking hands with the one-eyed milkman for a while wouldn't be a bad idea.

I opened my favorite website and was greeted by...

“Lady Ellize vs. Tentacles”

Huh?!

“Ellize: Tentacle Overdose.”

Huuuh?

“That Time I Got Reincarnated as Tentacles and Had a Little Fun with Ellize.”

HUUUH???!!!!

An all-too-familiar golden-haired beauty was plastered on every cover, scantily clad and surrounded by tentacles.

What the... You know what? I'll just pretend this never happened.

I'd just seen something I never should have. I was so turned off that I immediately closed the tab.

Nope! I didn't see anything! I don't know anything about this! Got it, brain?

I'd made a little detour along the way, but now I was ready to check out Ellize's wiki page. When I opened the home page, though, the headline of an article immediately caught my eye instead.

“Four hidden routes discovered four years after the launch of the game!” the article declared, featuring an artwork of Ellize under it. However, she didn’t look like her original self at all. It was Ellize 2.0, the one I was inside who’d stopped growing at fourteen years old.

What the heck is that? I thought as I clicked on the article.

I was met with the video of a player speedrunning *Kuon no Sanka*, titled “【LIVE】Kuon no Sanka RTA Let’s Play Ep.2 【Comments welcome】.” It had an *insane* number of views.

While it had “LIVE” in the title, the video itself had been uploaded a little over ten hours ago. I assumed someone had recorded a live stream and uploaded it after.

There’re always some idiots that reupload live streams without permission, huh? Anyway, let’s check it out.

It was a pretty typical RTA Let’s Play.

As I’d mentioned before, the quickest way to clear this game was to pick independent training every single time and never even try to talk to any of the cast. If you did that, you’d only have to go through the compulsory events and fights...which you’d easily plow through thanks to all that training.

As expected, the player in the video had poor Verner train endlessly without letting him enjoy the company of the heroines. Most of the comments were talking about Verner turning into a mountain of muscle or laughing about the heroines’ incredibly low affection level.

At the end of the seventeenth day, though, something completely unpredictable happened. Someone started knocking on Verner’s door, and an event was triggered.

“What? Did I mess up? When, though?! Guys, did I fail somewhere? That’s so weird! I was *positive* none of the girls cared about me in this run. Why would anyone come knock on my door? Aaargh, I’m gonna have to redo everything from the start, ain’t I?” the streamer sighed.

The viewers were just as confused as him.

You failed?

What the heck?

Hang on, I've never seen this event before...

In the game, Verner finally opened the door. Ellize, a non-dateable character, greeted him.

"GUUUUUUUUYS?! WHAT? *HOW*?! Are you for reaaaaal?! Why's Ellize here?! What's going on?" the streamer started screaming while the viewers spammed question marks in the comments.

While everyone was busy losing their mind, Ellize and Verner had a little talk on the screen. She was worried about him and urged him to try to make some friends instead of working out alone all the time. Then the topic switched to Verner's pendant, and the streamer got to make a choice. He had the main character tell her, "It's very precious to me. It's the symbol of my resolve, in a way."

A bell rang, and a chibi version of Ellize's face suddenly appeared in the lower right corner along with a little +1. This animation meant that the character you were talking to had started liking you a bit more, but...it only ever appeared for dateable girls.

"AM I DREAMING?! Ellize's affection went uuuuup!!! Is this some kinda bug?! Since when was there an Ellize route?! I've never heard about this, what the heck?!"

The streamer seemed to have completely forgotten about his initial goal of speedrunning the game, and the comments flooding the screen were just as wild.

For reaaaaaaal?! lmao

That's a mod, right?

What?! Seriously?????

The fuck?! It's my first time seeing Lady Ellize's

affection go up!

So she was dateable after all...

Dang, the start of her route is so obscure! lol

I paused the video and opened Ellize's page. It had changed a little compared to the last time I'd seen it. Before, her profile had started with "A non-dateable character of the game *Kuon no Sanka*." However, now they'd changed it to "A character who was thought to be non-dateable until a speedrunner discovered her route four years after the game's launch."

The rest didn't seem to have changed much, so I quickly scrolled down to the part I hadn't been able to read last time.

Game events:

- In Ellize's route:

A mysterious route discovered four years after the game came out.

Conditions to start the route:

Complete the CG collection.

Start a new save.

On your first run, keep the item "Pendant of Memories" on you until the seventeenth day.

After you enter the academy, fill every free time slot with "independent training" until the end of the seventeenth day. (The other heroines' affection level must be at base value.)

If all the conditions are complete, there is a low chance Ellize will visit you on the night of the seventeenth day. She will tell you how worried she is that you haven't made any friends and you will get the chance to increase her

affection level. (Unless you clear this event, Ellize will not become a dateable character and her affection level will not appear on the screen.)

The probability Ellize will visit you on the seventeenth day is around 0.3% according to the latest data.

According to some players, prioritizing muscle-building will increase the chance of Ellize visiting you, but this information has yet to be verified.

To ensure you can start the route, save before the last training session of the seventeenth day and reload as many times as needed.

This route has been discovered recently, so most events remain unknown. This guide will be updated in due time. (Please reach out if you have any information to share.)

What...the...hell?!

Did this whole thing about going to Verner's room start because I'd gone there earlier?!

Ellize's affection... I mean, I *had* thought it was sweet of him to have kept the pendant I'd given him, but...that didn't mean I was gonna date him!

No chance in hell!

I had no idea why everyone had suddenly conveniently forgotten that they were supposed to hate Ellize, the huge piece of shit! Anyway, this new version of Ellize was me—the shell of a saint with a dude inside!

Though I guess even the shell's a fake to begin with. There's nothing to save here. Why're you all so ready to jump on the "date Ellize" bandwagon? I need an explanation.

Well, it was too bad for them. As long as I was the one in control, there was absolutely *no* chance of Verner and I becoming an item.

It's just not happening. You can all give up, guys. Argh, just thinking about it

gives me the chills. Who'd want to unlock that hellish CG? Granted, I do like gender-bender stories—especially when the protagonist ends up becoming a total slut, but... Yeah, no. I'm so not going down that path myself.

Oops, my vision's becoming blurry again. Time to say bye-bye to my dream.

And so, I woke up as Ellize again.

Brrr! Now that was an awful dream. Why do I have to be a waifu? What a joke!

I got up and stretched a little. As expected, the world I was currently in felt much more real than the other one. I couldn't help but feel like I was actually *alive* here. On the other side, I always felt so light—like I was a ghost or something.

That being said, I wasn't over the whole becoming-a-dateable-character fiasco yet.

That's a big no-no. I'm never gonna let that happen!

Now, now. I didn't have the time to wallow in self-pity. I had some serious thinking to do.

I had succeeded in guiding Verner in the right direction. At the very least, he wouldn't end up with the gym rat ending.

And he did say he'd use "his life and soul" to "protect what's truly important." He'd totally meant Eterna, right?! Not that there were many possibilities to consider. He hadn't even *talked* to any of the other girls yet, so it had to be her. He'd even mentioned shielding the saint. I bet somehow, he must've had an inkling Eterna was the real deal all along!

Ha ha! The tender affections of a young heart! How nice. You go, Verner!

Hey, wait a sec... He couldn't have been talking about...*me*, right?

Nah, there's no way.

If he had been talking about me, he wouldn't have put it in such a roundabout way, riiight? He would've just said, "strong enough to shield you." Right?!

Verner's romantic interest in Eterna was all fine and dandy, but I hadn't accomplished my initial goal at all.

Since that musclehead hadn't even *done* anything yet, I had no way of gauging when Farah was going to attack Eterna. The story was stuck at the very beginning, which meant I couldn't predict when each event would be triggered.

It wasn't my fault for failing to predict that, right? How was I supposed to guess Verner would pull something like that?

Seriously, who the hell jumps head-first into the solo ending? Did a speedrun streamer take over his body or what? Alas! What a mess!

My biggest issue right now really was that I couldn't stay at the academy full-time. It was the main stage, and I was forced to stay backstage. I wouldn't even know when the events would finally start happening. The thing was, that knowledge was *absolutely crucial* if I were to give Eterna the happy ending she deserved.

On top of that, there were plenty of beauties—just like Farah—that were certain to die if nothing was done. It'd be such a pity. Seriously, *Kuon no Sanka* was way too brutal for a dating sim.

What do I do...? Argh! Damn it! There's no point in overthinking it, is there?

If I had no way of knowing when the events would get triggered without being a student of the academy, there was only one thing left for me to do—I'd enroll in the academy; simple as that.

If I was there, I'd have a much easier time stopping Farah's assassination attempt.

I did say it was unheard of for the mighty saint to study in the very place that was responsible for nurturing her guard...but then again, Eterna, the true saint, was already enrolled in the academy. That was already unheard of. One little extra unprecedented event wouldn't make such a big difference, now, would it?

Besides, I'd already become quite influential. I'd coax anyone who opposed my decision with sweet flattery or pull out the big guns if it came down to it.

And didn't Ellize do much worse in the original story? She'd had the whole

academy under her thumb, so she'd done whatever she'd wanted to the students. About half of the issues that occurred while the characters were at school were her doing!

What should my excuse be, though?

I could say I longed for a normal school life; that'd make sense considering my current age. Or I could try to convince everyone that the academy was the safest place for me since the students were all technically guards in training.

Whatever! I'm sure some random bullshit will do.

Now that I'd made up my mind, I just needed to—

Hmm? Someone's knocking? Who's bothering me? I was finally getting to the good part!

"Please come in," I said nonetheless.

One of the beauties who served in my guard opened the door. "Please excuse me, Lady Ellize. May I have a bit of your precious time?"

She was a tall woman, around twenty years old, and her jet-black hair was tied in a high ponytail. She had graduated from the academy last year at the top of her class and had naturally been chosen to join my elite guard.



Layla Scott, who wore her uniform complete with an insignia that marked her rank with grace, was actually another dateable heroine. She was a noble, and unlike Verner or me, was allowed to carry her family's name.

Verner, Eterna, and I weren't nobles and, as such, we didn't have family names. There were only a few other characters who, like Layla, hailed from such houses and carried their names.

In the original story, she'd also served in the saint's guard, but begrudgingly so. She'd held a strong resentment against Ellize for flaunting her authority and acting like a tyrant. Her dissatisfaction for having to use her hard-earned title for someone so messed up and trashy eventually came to a head, and there was an event where she betrayed Ellize and joined Verner's side. She had plenty of evidence of Ellize's evil deeds and publicized them, leading to the fake's downfall.

In other words, Layla would eventually betray me and be responsible for my downfall. I didn't act like the original Ellize, so I wasn't sure she hated me as much, but I was just as guilty as the original goods when it came to deceiving everyone and pretending to be the saint.

Even if I *had* done some good, once my treachery finally came to light, I'd be cast away or killed—not that I had any complaints about that.

It all went to show how important the saint was in this world. The sin of impersonating her was already a really heavy crime.

Well, I didn't really care either way. My goal hadn't changed; I'd give Eterna her rightful place back no matter the cost. I wouldn't mind if Layla ended up betraying me or whatever...just not yet.

"It's not worthy of your concern, but I would like to inform you that a professor of the academy, Farah Dremy, has taken several students hostage. She is confining herself and them in the academy's basement at this very moment."

The hell?! Was there an event like that?!

I had cleared every single route. How come I'd never heard about this event?

What are you doing, Farah?! You're supposed to stay put until you try to kill Eterna, not play some rogue wanna-be crime lord!

"Do you know who these students are?" I asked.

"Yes. Four of them are first-year students—Verner, Eterna, Fiora, and John. The other three—Abun, Chof, and Ekkstraz—are second-year students."

All total background characters besides Verner and Eterna. Doesn't look like there are any dateable girls with them.

I couldn't say I gave a rat's ass about the other random characters, but Verner and Eterna being trapped there was bad news.

Isn't Farah doing a muuuuch better job this time? Although this raises the question: why hasn't she killed them all yet and called it a day?

"I'm sure they will soon be rescued, so you need not worry, Lady Ellize."

Layla! What do you mean, "I need not worry"?! I don't even know what she wants yet!

"What are her demands?" I asked.

If Farah had gone through the trouble of taking hostages, she must've had *some* sort of demands. That was obviously the most important factor, so I wasn't sure why Layla hadn't started with that.

Nah, I actually knew exactly why—she'd always been like that, which had prompted her fans to affectionately nickname her Layla Scotterbrain.

How did that clumsy girl manage to graduate at the top of her grade?

"I... I do not believe you need to trouble yourself with that, Lady Ellize."

Come on, out with it! I'll decide for myself if I care or not, so spill the beans already!

"The thing is... Farah Dremy has asked that...you enter the basement alone. She said you could not bring any guards with you..."

*So that's why you wouldn't say it, huh? How am I so lucky? The event kindly invited me to join all by itself! Yaaaay!!! Well, without further ado, then—
LAYLA, DON'T STOP ME! I'LL DO WHATEVER I PLEASE!*

Chapter 5: A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Why, hello! Greetings, salutations, et cetera! Your most-despicable idol, Ellize, is here for the show! Did you miss me?

Professor Farah had been so kind as to send me an invitation, so I was on my way to the academy. It had taken me a *little* longer than expected because all of my guards had ganged up on me to try to stop me, but here I was, en route!

Scotterbrain had been especially hard to outrun. It was so funny to see her chase after me while yelling, “For goodness’ sake, Lady Ellize!” Her desperate expression was hilarious! I was so used to seeing her look all stoic and serious in the game. Honestly, the gap was kind of endearing.

I didn’t expect someone like her to worry for me in earnest. In the original story, she only ever pretended to be meek in front of Ellize as she bided her time. She probably wished for Ellize to drop dead each time she bid the fake saint a safe trip whenever she went out.

I have her completely fooled, don’t I? Though I guess she’ll only hate me more later on when she discovers the truth. People usually got way more emotional if they were betrayed or disappointed by someone they held dear. *The greatest hate springs from the greatest love, right?*

Now that Layla was sincere in her loyalty to me, I couldn’t even imagine how much she’d change after she learned that I’d been playing her the whole time. I only knew her reaction would be...fiery, to say the least.

I knew my fate, and I was fully ready for her to be the one to banish or eliminate me when the time came. It was better if I kept that in mind so I wouldn’t be disappointed either.

Anyway, while my guards had wasted some time, they hadn’t managed to stop me. Even without a single day of training in her life, the original Ellize had been one of the strongest people alive, and she’d been able to easily defeat the most powerful monsters if she’d wanted to. I’d topped all of that incredible

potential by also training every day. Shaking off a few guards was child's play to me.

Remember how I could *fly*? It was easy to do if I used a combination of wind and light magic. Though if you asked me to explain *how* I did it or *why* it worked, I wouldn't know what to answer—no one else could really replicate it since flight magic wasn't really a thing here.

Anyway, it just meant no one could catch me. QED!

Flying type's way too OP, guys. Though I guess some annoying trainers will just spam buffs while your little guy's up in the air... Or worse! Use a thunder attack!

Anyway, I was flying toward the academy at full speed. As soon as I arrived, I went down to the basement.

Here I am, tiddies! Let me cop a feel, babe! Oh, and can you release the hostages while you're at it? Pretty please?

"Lady Ellize, you can't come in here! It's a trap!" Verner screamed.

Look, Verner...uh, how should I put this? You're the main character, you know? What are you doing getting captured with your waifu? With Farah in the state she's in, you're rushing toward a bad end, dude. This is all your fault! You spent too much time training. Couldn't you have turned on your brain instead?! Oh my God, hang on—he looks way too funny all trussed up like a chicken! Oh no... I'm gonna laugh...

"To think you'd really come... You're even more good-natured than I expected. Or should I say even more of an idiot?" Farah said.

Bingo—I'm an idiot. I can't really deny that part, but I wouldn't say I'm good-natured. Okay, I know I really shouldn't be saying this about myself, but I doubt there're many people more self-centered than I am.

The only reason I'd decided to come save Verner and Eterna was because I wanted to have a good time watching their happy ending. I didn't like feeling depressed while thinking of my darling Eterna's grim fate.

So don't mistake my intentions, Miss Tiddies. All right?

At the end of the day, I was ready to destroy this entire world if it meant I got to see the story I wanted. I didn't really care what the characters themselves thought of that either.

"I will not deny that second part. But I must say you overestimate the goodness of my heart. Everything I do is simply for myself."

"Ha! You sure don't lose your composure easily, Saint. I wonder if you'll be able to keep that straight face much longer," Farah said, raising her arm.

Wow, her boobs jiggle whenever she moves. Gotta love that. What a bombshell. That's why you can't underestimate F cups. Oops, I'm gonna start drooling if I don't pay attention!

"Behold! How do you presume to fight all thirty of these monsters, Saint?! This underground arena has been built to train students—there's no escape! You'll now have to fight for your life here! No matter how strong you are, you won't leave unscathed!"

Hmm? Had she summoned something? I'd been so focused on her boobs that I hadn't noticed at all. She was kind of forcing my hand, so I reluctantly tore my eyes away from her chest and looked in the direction she was pointing at.

Indeed, there were a bunch of small fries swarming in a corner.
One...two...three... Do I even care? She could bring a thousand of those little guys and it wouldn't make a difference.

"Kill her!" she ordered.

W-Wait! I haven't thought of a cool attack name yet! Hmm... Um... Oh, whatever! I'll just blurt whatever comes through my mind.

I started to cast light magic.

"A picture is worth a thousand words," I said in perfect—well, save for the pronunciation—English.

Good going, me! English words always sound the coolest when you're naming a super attack. Any chuunibyou could tell you that.

Light started radiating from my body, and the monsters who'd jumped at me crumbled into dust in a split second.



This is... AMAZING! I just love this feeling so much! I'm in another world now, so I have to be the strongest and destroy everything! I don't make the rules, that's just how things should be!

The ecstasy of destroying weaklings with a flick of my finger... I couldn't get enough.

"I-Impossible! How could you...?! You killed them all by yourself?! Even the members of the saint's guard struggle to fight more than one monster at once... How did you destroy them with a single attack?!"

"A-Amazing," Verner said.

"So that's...the saint's powers..." Eterna muttered.

Yes, yes, praise me more. This is nice! Now I get why everyone writes self-inserts. I'm really going to get addicted to this feeling.

Didn't that one famous game's villain also say something along the lines of "Nothing beats the thrill of victory! The envy in the eyes of your comrades as they realize your superiority! I don't favor fighting... I favor winning!"

That being said... What are you on about, Eterna? You're the saint, not me.

Now, then, I believe we have a winner, Farah. It's time for bad girls to receive their punishment now. Don't worry, I won't kill you—I'll just enjoy your tiddies a little bit, heh heh heh.

Farah let out a high-pitched yelp. Had she somehow sensed my bad intentions? She stepped back, a fearful look in her eyes.

You don't need to be so scared, baby. Everything's fine, heh heh heh. I'll just cop a little feel. Nothing too mean, I promise.

Farah wasn't done, though. "I-I was right to prepare a backup plan..." she said, snapping her fingers.

A small monster, which had been hiding in a corner of the room, jumped and landed right behind Eterna and Verner. Its arms were sharp like blades and it pressed them against both their throats.

Uh oh, did I miss one? It was so tiny I didn't see it.

“I won’t hesitate to kill them if you resist, Saint! Let me stab you! If you agree, I’ll send the students back unharmed! You won’t leave them to die, will you?” she threatened, taking out a knife. The *weapons* on her chest jiggled nicely in the process.

So *that* was why she’d kept her hostages alive all this time. I was in a pickle now, wasn’t I? It was game over if these two died.

Then again, maybe it wasn’t? I *had* taken Verner’s dark powers (lol) into my body. I probably also had a shot at defeating the witch, didn’t I? I was pretty confident I could also take the rest of the monsters by myself and save the world. But it couldn’t really be called a happy ending if the fake got a glorious victory while the original main characters died now, could it?

And if I did that, there wouldn’t be any point in everything I’d done up until now.

Wait... Did that dumbass really think I was the real saint? In the game, she’d been one of the first to notice that Eterna was the real deal! *Where’d your brain cells go, Farah?* She had a great rack and a perfect face to match, so it didn’t really matter if she was an idiot, but still...

Farah was tired of waiting for my answer. “What will you choose, Saint?!”

“Don’t listen to her, Lady Ellize! Don’t concern yourself with us!” Verner screamed.

“He’s right! You can’t die in such a place!” Eterna pleaded.

“Run! Please! I beg of you, Saint!”

“Yes! Please run away!”

There was a ton of screaming in my ears going on. The last two were total random characters, so I didn’t really care about their names.

My little Eterna, you do realize you’re the one who can’t die here, right? If anything, my death here wouldn’t matter much in the long run.

Either way, I wasn’t too fond of the deal Farah offered, but there was only one option left.

Whatever! Let’s see you try to kill Ellize, Miss Tiddies!

Farah burst out laughing. “To think you’d be so stupid! I’m astonished!”

She was certain she had won as she walked toward me, knife in hand. I could sense the witch’s dark energy on it, but it didn’t really matter.

Miss Tiddies was now right in front of me.

“NO!”

Shut up, Verner! You’re so noisy. Can’t you see I’m busy ogling? Don’t distract me.

Spoiler, but a little knife like that had around zero percent chance of actually killing Ellize. Her healing magic was impressive, and I was currently using it on myself to increase my recovery speed. No matter how many times she was planning to stab me, I’d heal right away.

Besides, Verner’s dark powers (lol) worked to keep their host alive, even against their will, so I was even harder to kill than the original Ellize.

I’m the fake saint! Don’t look down on me, idiot! Your puny knife has no power on my mighty body! HA HA HA HA HA!!!

Good thing Farah was a little stupid. She just walked up to me without noticing that anything was amiss.

Once she’d stabbed me, I’d pretend to be dead for a while. Then, when she lowered her guard, I’d go for the monster first before punishing her.

I didn’t want to feel pain, so I’d block the electrical signal being sent to my brain with thunder magic one way or another. A perfect plan.

“Promise me... Promise me that you will release everyone else,” I checked with Farah.

“I’ll keep my word. I’d also get a bad taste in my mouth if I killed unrelated students. You’re the only one I want dead.”

“I understand. Then go on,” I agreed to her terms.

All right. Now she should leave the hostages alone.

Although Farah was currently being controlled, she was originally a good person and possessed a strong sense of duty. I trusted her not to harm the

students for no reason.

That sense of duty of yours will be your downfall, dumbass!

“AAAAAAAAAAARGH!!!”

Huh? Did Verner suddenly tear off the ropes that had tied him down? How? Through dark magic...? No way. Did he just brute force his way out?

He grabbed the monster’s head and hurled it at Farah with all his strength.

Looks like player Farah is being pushed back! Indeed, she hits the wall!
GOAAAAAAAAAL!!!

Farah? Miss Tiddies? Heeeeey! Anyone home? She’s out cold... Guess that means I’m free to get some hands-on experience?



From the get-go, something had seemed off.

Verner had been called to the basement under the pretense of extracurricular lessons. His grades weren’t good enough, Miss Farah had said. Sadly enough, that part was true.

While he had been training his body and excelled at his practical exams, Verner had barely studied since he’d entered the academy. As such, his grades for academic subjects were far from spectacular.

When he’d arrived at the basement, Eterna, as well as five other students whom he had never seen before, were already waiting.

While it might’ve sounded surprising to some, Eterna’s grades were terrible. It wasn’t all that strange, though—up until a little while ago, the young girl hadn’t even been able to read or write. She’d had no use for such skills in her small provincial village.

In this world, the literacy rate was fairly low. Only the children of nobles and wealthy merchants learned such things. Commoners usually didn’t even *entertain* the idea of learning to read or write—it just wasn’t necessary.

As a result, Eterna had never even seen written letters before she’d arrived at the academy. It was already impressive enough that the young girl could now

read and write proficiently.

Naturally, literacy alone wasn't enough to perform in a school meant to teach the elite, and she was still far behind most of the students.

The very system in place at the academy benefited the sons and daughters of the nobility. Or, to put things in a different way, it hadn't been built with the lowborn students in mind. It wasn't to say that the children of poor villages didn't aspire to become knights—only that, even if they did, they usually had no way of passing the grueling admission examination.

The reason was fairly simple: their rivals had trained and studied since they were old enough to hold swords. Thus, the nobles were better prepared for the examination. That's all there was to it.

People like Eterna or Verner—who'd succeeded in enrolling in spite of their lack of preparation—could already be considered remarkable for this very feat. Still, the gap between them and the others remained large.

For people like them—Verner simply assumed that the other five were in a similar situation, since none of them bore family names either—extracurricular lessons were a dream come true.

Well... For *most* people like them, at least. Verner wasn't particularly interested. If he had time to spare, he'd much rather practice his sword, learn magic, or do some physical training. He had to become stronger.

Eterna had insisted and made him promise not to waste the opportunity, so he'd begrudgingly gone along.

Still, he couldn't help but feel like something was fishy.

They'd been told they would study school subjects, but they hadn't gathered in a classroom; they were in an underground arena meant to fight monsters. Only the best students usually got to train against live monsters. Why would such a grand place be used for the seven students? It was just strange.

Verner wasn't the only one to sense that something was amiss, but now that they were there, it was already too late.

"Welcome to my special lesson. I'm glad to have all of you here, and I hope

you're ready to listen to me very obediently," Farah, the female professor who'd invited them, said while snapping her fingers.

The door slammed shut and large monsters started appearing in the arena.

"M-Miss Farah! What is going on here?" one of the students exclaimed.

His name was John. He'd grown up in a small village and used to work as a soldier. He had almost died after being cornered by monsters with the rest of his squadron, but the saint had saved his life. On that day, he'd sworn to himself that he'd become stronger so he could fight by her side. He'd started studying relentlessly and, at the age of twenty, had finally passed the entrance examination.

Students could enter the academy from the age of seventeen, but there was no upper limit. It wasn't rare for older students to enroll.

"Your name was...John, right?" Farah asked. "I'm sorry. I must say I have no need for you, but I couldn't very well call in a single student. You all have mediocre grades, so it sounded more believable, didn't it? The rest of you are...collateral damage. I hope you'll find it in yourselves to forgive me."

"What are you—" John tried to ask, only for Farah to cut him off right away.

"My objective was you, Verner—you and you alone. You'll make a very fine hostage," she said, looking at Verner.

A hostage? Whatever for? Verner didn't understand who she hoped to threaten by kidnapping him. He was nothing but a commoner. She'd never get any ransom money with him as her hostage.

"I know that the saint Ellize visited your room yesterday. I have no idea what she sees in you, but there's no doubt she's interested in you."

"So you mean to—"

"Indeed. I mean to threaten Ellize with your life."

Verner couldn't help but think her plan was absurd. Sure, Lady Ellize had visited him, but that was only because she was a kind person. She didn't care about him in particular—she would've done the same for anyone.

He was nothing but one of the many people she tried to protect. She'd never

take the bait and endanger herself for a single man she barely knew...

No! She will, Verner's brain cried. She won't be able to stay put! She won't care who it is, she'll risk her life to save anyone!

Ellize was a benevolent saint. She'd never abandon anyone.

She had once said that she loved this world and everyone in it—a belief she'd proven time and time again with her actions. She extended a helping hand to anyone she could reach, regardless of their origins, wealth, or character.

If she heard that someone had been kidnapped because of her, she'd rush to them in a heartbeat... No matter *who* they were. Even if she had never heard of their name before.

Please don't come... You can't endanger yourself for someone like me... Please...

Verner's wish wouldn't be heard. If there was someone who needed her, and that someone was within her grasp, she'd come no matter what.

That was her very *raison d'être* as the saint.

To make a long story short, Verner's concerns turned out to be completely unnecessary. While Ellize had done exactly what he'd feared, she was far stronger than Farah's monsters.

Even though Farah had only been able to summon monsters that could fit inside the arena, they were all incredibly powerful. Baphomets, chimeras, basilisks, griffins, and even a dragon lunged at her.

The best recent graduates of the academy would need to band together to defeat even a single one of them, yet Ellize was forced to face all of them at once... *Alone*.

Ellize had said something in a language Verner didn't understand.

"A picture is worth a thousand words."

At the same time, rays of light started radiating from her body. Everything went bright for a moment, and when the light finally disappeared, not a single monster remained.

The students needed a few seconds to comprehend what had just transpired. It was just too overwhelming for them to make sense of it.

Ellize had erased them from existence. The monsters didn't belong in the picture she'd envisioned, so she'd erased them, plain and simple.

Farah's confidence crumbled in an instant, and she stepped back in fear. The monsters she'd summoned were far from weak, but they still hadn't held a candle to the saint. The sinful beings hadn't managed to lay one claw upon her holy body.

Verner and the others had heard that Ellize was referred to as the greatest saint in history many times in the past.

According to the rumors, she could defeat monsters that would've been strong enough to threaten her predecessors' lives without so much as touching them. According to the rumors, she didn't need more than ten seconds to wipe out an entire army of monsters. According to the rumors, even the witch feared her and was doing everything in her power to avoid a direct confrontation.

There were thousands of rumors about the saint, but Verner and the others had all thought they had been exaggerated. Now, they realized they hadn't been. If anything...mere words weren't enough to tell of her might.

Indeed, a picture was worth a thousand words.

"A-Amazing."

"So that's...the saint's powers..."

Verner and Eterna hadn't been able to stop themselves from speaking up.

Their words slipped into cliché, but that was the best they could muster at the moment. They couldn't find the right words to express the admiration they felt. The more they thought of a good way to put it, the more it sounded like what the saint had done wasn't all that impressive. They could easily explain regular events by detailing them, but Ellize's might far transcended their understanding. They knew that she was incredible, but they would've been hard-pressed to say *how* exactly.

After that, Farah tried to threaten Ellize with Verner and Eterna's lives again,

but Verner somehow succeeded in breaking free of his bonds and knocked her down.

Ellize walked up to her, crouched in front of her, and placed her hands on the unconscious woman's breasts. That was when Verner noticed that an ominous black mist was escaping from Farah's chest.

What in the world is this?! Could it be the same as mine?

Verner didn't know what that black mist was, but considering Ellize's actions, she did.

Ellize got rid of the black mist before turning to the students and revealing that it was the true culprit of today's events.

Chapter 6: Misunderstanding

If I had to compare them to something else, I'd pick...twin mountains. Wait, no—mounds of marshmallows. While they rose high and proud like mighty mountains, they were also soft and jiggly to the touch.

The feel of her skin against my hands was firm, yet soft, and I could feel my fingers sink into the plush, pliant peaks.

As you might've guessed, I was currently fondling Farah's perfect tiddies. *One of the perks of my position.*

Surprisingly enough, this whole ordeal had been solved by Verner and his strong muscles.

Didn't expect that, huh? Yeah, me neither.

In the original story, Farah had been dealt with in one of two ways—either by Verner, who figured out how to use his dark powers (lol), or by Eterna, who used her powers as the saint to triumph. In either case, one of the main characters was supposed to have an awakening in the face of danger and gain access to their hidden powers.

And yet, Verner's special hidden power in this storyline was being buff.

He had torn through the ropes with brute force and pulverized a monster by throwing it at someone.

And done! Time for a standing ovation! No, seriously, who could've predicted that?

The thing was that *Kuon no Sanka* did have some stupid gag scenes like this one sprinkled throughout, so I couldn't really complain, could I?

Anyway, thanks to him I'd been given the perfect opportunity to fondle Farah's boobs, so it was all good!

Now, let's get back to the topic at hand—quite literally.

As much as I wished I could spend the rest of the day enjoying Farah's assets,

that wouldn't look very professional. Especially since I actually had a respectable reason for doing this...well, for the time being, at least.

The weird black mist coming out from her chest was responsible for everything that had happened until now, so I had to purge the witch's energy from Farah's body. But, hey, the ominous mist had given me a perfectly good excuse to cop a feel. Forget the fact that I was totally doing this for my own personal enjoyment—this was *really* all done in the name of justice, of course!

Black mist, you're a true bro. But you could've done me a solid and taken over her crotch area too, couldn't you?

If only *Kuon no Sanka* was an erotic game instead of a dating sim, then that would've happened for sure! Then Verner would've had to use his big magnum to treat her, right? FIRE!

Aaaargh! Now I'll never get to see that! Everything's screwed up because of you, black mist! You're so useless!

Anyway, I'd pretended to pinpoint the black mist before I started touching her, so everyone *should've* believed I was doing this for a very good reason. I used the dark power (lol) I had borrowed from Verner to forcefully pull out the witch's powers from Farah's body.

Normally, the witch's power could only be purged by the saint. That was why, in your first run when you had to fight Farah without Eterna, she was bound to die no matter what.

However, there was actually one more way to counter the witch's powers even without the saint—although the player would have no way of knowing at that point in the story. The key was to use the witch's powers against her: dark magic.

By the way, besides the saint's magic and dark magic, nothing else—and I mean absolutely nothing, trust me—would ever work against the witch. Even if you were to blast hundreds of spells powerful enough to destroy entire cities on her, she'd remain completely unscathed.

Then again, maybe I couldn't be a hundred percent sure of that. The witch may have limits I wasn't aware of. For instance, I was pretty sure a nuke would

tear her to shreds in a heartbeat. Such weapons of mass destruction didn't exist in this world, though, so it didn't matter much.

All in all, my point was that, in this world, only the saint's power and the witch's power could work. Why? Well, because both of these powers were essentially the same.

Uh-oh! I just blurted out a big spoiler, didn't I? You're not supposed to learn that this early in the game. Oops!

Anyway, with dark magic, I could save Farah. *Time to fish the darkness out!*

I pulled on the mist and removed my hand from the warmth of Farah's boobies. In my closed fist, I held the black mist that had been manipulating the mammaries. I crushed it, and it exploded into particles of light that soon fluttered away.

"Lady Ellize... What just happened?" one of Farah's ex-hostages asked meekly.

Oh? Who might you be? I've never seen you in the game, but you're a total babe.

Now that I took a closer look at her, though, I realized I'd met her once three years ago. She'd used to have a huge scar on her face and I'd fixed it.

I remember now! You were already pretty cute three years ago!

The girl I'd saved had grown into a fine beauty. How nice. I told her as much, and she looked at me in awe, deeply moved.

"W-We'd only met once before, but you remembered me..."

I'd never forget a pretty face! Who do you take me for?

Anyway, she was asking me about the mist, wasn't she?

I explained that it had been controlling Farah all along. She was nothing but a victim, and I told them I hoped they wouldn't blame her. She had committed a grave sin, but she deserved forgiveness... At least for the sake of her impressive tiddies.

"Lady Ellize... It's been a long time. You may not remember me, but my name is John. I was a soldier when you saved me and my comrades from certain

death. So... Miss Farah was forced to do all of this?"

Uh, and you are...?! Sorry bro, but I don't commit dudes to memory... Or so I wish I could say, but there are too many eyes on us. I'll nod and pretend I totally know who he is. What, are you thinking I'm a wuss for pretending? You're right on the money! I am.

While I chatted with the students, we heard sets of heavy footsteps approaching, as if several people were coming down the stairs. The door slammed open, and Scotterbrain, accompanied by the rest of my guard, rushed in.

"Lady Ellize! Are you all right?!" she yelled.

I assured Scotterbrain that I was fine.

She ran up to me at full speed and started sobbing.

"I'm so glad...you're all right... Lady Ellize, please... Never do something like this again..."

Looks like someone was really worried about me. You have a cute side to you, don't you, Scotterbrain?

I felt a bit bad. She'd be even more hurt when she finally learned the truth... I had no qualms about her betraying me. If anything, I was convinced it was a good thing.

Ever since she was a toddler, she'd been raised in the most spartan of ways in order to become a perfect member of the saint's guard. Her entire life up until now had been dedicated to the saint.

Since Eterna was the real deal, the sad truth was that she had been dedicating her life to a fake.

Back when I played the game, I used to cheer her on. "Stop putting up with that piece of shit! Come on! Abandon her and live your life already!" I'd say.

I liked her a lot, so I wanted her to leave my side and go to Eterna, but I also knew that hearing her harsh criticisms when the time came would take a toll on me.

Let's get along until that happens, my dear Layla.

I decided to stop calling her Scotterbrain even in my thoughts. It wasn't very nice, after all.

While I was busy thinking about all that, Layla noticed Farah, who was still lying unconscious on the floor. She started approaching her with her sword in hand and the scariest face I'd ever seen her make.

"You! How dare you threaten Lady Ellize! You're a disgrace! There's no need to wait for a trial! I'll have your head right this instant, you scum!"

Scotterbrain?!

I gathered mana around my arm and hurriedly blocked her sword.

Phew...

"Lady Ellize?! Why are you— Your arm! Are you hurt?!"

Of course not! Easy peasy.

It was a good thing I hadn't gotten hurt—if anyone else had tried that, they'd have lost their arm on the spot. Plus, if I *had* taken damage from a regular blade, the fact I was a fake would've been revealed on the spot. Just like the witch, the saint could only be hurt by her own powers or the witch's.

Since Farah had been controlled by the witch, it would've been logical if *she'd* hurt me, but it would've been completely impossible for my guard's blade to cut me...in theory. I wouldn't have been able to handwave it away with an explanation.

In fact, what had convinced everyone that Ellize was really a fake in the original game was that she'd gotten hurt.

I reassured Scotterbrain by telling her that her blade could never have hurt me. Only the witch's magic and the saint's magic were effective on me, blah blah blah. It was a lie, but I needed her to calm down. I also explained that Farah was just a hapless victim in this situation and hadn't meant for any of this to happen.

Even though I'd just said that, my guards couldn't help but be wary of Farah, so they restrained her anyway. They'd believed me enough to resist killing her on the spot, at least, so that was already a win.

After that, Scotterbrain dragged me back home, so I didn't get the chance to chat with Verner or Eterna.



Eterna had a secret she kept from everyone else.

For as long as she could remember, she'd never gotten hurt. Or, to put it more accurately, she'd never gotten hurt because of anyone or anything other than herself.

At first, she hadn't paid it much mind; she'd just figured it was luck.

However, she'd finally noticed that something was wrong after she'd been attacked by a wild beast in the forest. The bear *had* charged at her, its sharp claws *had* touched her skin, and its pointed fangs *had* tried to dig into her flesh. And yet...she hadn't felt any pain. Her clothes had been torn beyond recognition, but not even a scratch had appeared on her body.

While part of the reason Eterna had decided to enroll in the academy was worry for Verner—she'd wanted to make sure he'd be all right—her main goal was to finally uncover the truth about herself. She wanted to know what she was, and she had a feeling she'd find the answer to that question at the academy.

Eventually, she had.

"The witch and the saint can only be hurt by each other, or by their very own power."

What she'd learned in class was oddly reminiscent of her own situation. She also couldn't suffer injuries at the hand of anyone but herself. Did that mean she was the saint, then?

But there was already a saint, and not just any saint—Ellize was known as the greatest one in history.

She'd heard of Ellize's many achievements in class—killing thousands of monsters by herself, single-handedly curing every infirm person in a village on her own, turning a wasteland into a flower field just by walking through it, et cetera—and she couldn't believe that she'd truly done all of that at her age.

Two saints couldn't be born in the same generation, which meant that either she or Ellize was a fake. But was it possible for someone who was lauded as the greatest saint to ever grace these lands to be a fake? It just didn't make any sense.

What confused Eterna even more was that no one knew who this generation's witch was. No one had ever seen her. Everyone thought that she was hiding because she was afraid of Ellize, but...was that really the case?

Could it be that...Eterna herself was the witch without being aware of it?

If two people fit the bill of not sustaining injuries, one had to be the saint and the other the witch. That was the logical outcome.

Ellize couldn't be the witch; it was simply out of the question. Why would the witch slaughter monsters by the thousands? Why should she spend most of her time rescuing and healing people? What could she stand to gain from such selfless actions? *Nothing*. The witch would never put herself in such a disadvantageous position.

Eterna felt like she might crumble under the weight of her worries. She wanted to believe she wasn't the witch, but... What if she was? She couldn't rid herself of that fear.

After she'd seen Ellize in the flesh, her anxiety had only grown. She had the power of wiping out an entire army of gigantic monsters at once, all the while looking so ethereally beautiful that anyone would be taken in by her charms.

It seemed to Eterna that the word "saint" had been crafted just for Ellize. She embodied the very idea of holiness. Now that she'd seen her in action with her own eyes, she realized all over again just how different the two of them were. Up until then, she'd clung onto the hope that maybe, just maybe, Ellize was the fake after all; that maybe she was nothing more than a regular person with strong magical powers. While even Eterna herself admitted that it sounded ridiculous and far-fetched, she was ready to believe anything as long as it pointed away from the possibility that she was the hateful witch.

But now, after she'd witnessed the other girl in action, she knew that there was just no way Ellize could be a fake. She'd been the only one to sense the witch's magic inside Farah, and she'd been able to purge it. Eterna, on the other

hand, hadn't even noticed that Farah wasn't acting out of her own volition.

When Eterna had seen Ellize touch Farah's chest, she'd had been a little puzzled at first. In fact, she'd even wondered if the famed saint was a closeted pervert. But it turned out she had been completely wrong. Ellize could never have such impure thoughts; she'd simply done whatever she could to save Farah. In the end, Eterna was the one who'd exposed her foolishness by even considering something like that.

"You... I saw you once in the past, did I not? I believe it was in the village of Fohr, correct? You've grown into such a beauty that I did not recognize you at first," Ellize had told one of the hostages.

"W-We'd only met once before, but you remembered me..."

"How could I forget you?" Ellize had asked with a smile.

"I'm honored..."

"You wanted to know about this mist, did you not? It's the real culprit behind what transpired here today. It was created by the witch, and it had been controlling Farah this entire time. She's also a victim, so please don't blame her."

"A-A victim? But...what she did was an act of rebellion against our country... No, against the world! Trying to kill the saint isn't some petty crime that can be forgiven!"

"You're right—Farah has committed a grave sin, but I hope that all of you can find it in your hearts to pardon her. A forgiving heart is a great virtue."

While she'd spoken, Ellize had destroyed the mist. Only the saint or the witch herself could hope to destroy a spell cast by the witch, so she'd proven her might as the saint. An ordinary person—no matter how skilled they might've been in magic—could never achieve something like that.

It was at that point when any hopes that Ellize was just a skilled magician had vanished from Eterna's heart.

A few moments later, the saint's guards stormed in, and one of them tried to deliver the final blow to Farah. Ellize hadn't even hesitated for a moment before

she'd dove in front of her, using her bare arm to block her sword. Miraculously...she hadn't sustained any injuries.

"Lady Ellize?! Why are you— Your arm! Are you hurt?!"

"Your blade cannot hurt me, so calm your heart. Only the witch's magic and the saint's magic are effective on me. You're aware of that, are you not?"

Eterna felt her heart grow cold. She was so disappointed that Ellize was the real deal, and she loathed herself for feeling that way.

Ellize was the saint. There was no room for Eterna to doubt that anymore.

She had been able to sense the witch's magic, purge it, save the poor woman who was being controlled, and block a sword with her arm without getting hurt. She was strong, beautiful, and above all, kind.

How could Eterna have ever believed such foolish things? While she'd been busy wallowing in self-pity and clinging to ridiculous hopes, Ellize had been doing everything in her power to help people. She'd even put her own life in danger for the sake of seven strangers.

She's the real deal... And I'm nothing like her. I'm not as pretty, not as strong...and certainly not as commendable.

After the day's events, Ellize had been dragged away by the members of her guards, but Eterna had barely noticed. She didn't have the leisure to observe her surroundings anymore. The truth had come crashing down on her, and it was all too obvious what she truly was.

If two people had the attributes of the saint and of the witch, it stood to reason that they were those people. Ellize was no fake... And she sure as hell wasn't the witch. That meant the real saint already existed. Then, if she were to follow that logic, there was only one conclusion Eterna could draw.

No one had seen this generation's witch yet, so no one knew her name or what she looked like. And Eterna just so happened to have the same abilities as her...

I understand now...

Eterna staggered all the way to her room. Had the world always been such a

dark place? She had never felt so miserable in her entire life.

Then again, it was only natural for the world to appear dark in her eyes. After all, she was...

The witch. I was the witch all along.

...the hateful witch that threatened humanity.

Chapter 7: The Ones Who Observe

After the stunt she'd pulled, Farah had been taken to a courthouse for her trial. I had insisted time and time again that she was innocent, so I was pretty sure she wouldn't be charged with the death penalty.

If I hadn't vouched for her, though, she would've been sentenced to death regardless of her actual involvement. To be honest, I *did* think that the justice system in this world was a *little* excessive, but for the inhabitants here, threatening the life of the saint was just too terrible a crime to be forgiven. Well, I wasn't *really* the saint, but they didn't know that.

Hey... Now that I thought about it, I'd probably be sentenced to death too after my lies had been exposed.

Anyway, after I'd returned to my castle and rested for the night, I woke up the next day only to be surrounded by my guards and teachers and lectured for hours.

I could see where they were coming from—while protecting me was their responsibility, I kept running around and risking my life to save people. If I ended up dying during one of my impromptu expeditions, they'd lose their jobs and be treated like a bunch of incompetent idiots for allowing it to happen in the first place. It was only natural that they'd get mad at me.

Fortunately, I'd thought of this and planned ahead. To prevent something like that from ever happening, I'd prepared a letter which explained that I was the fake. It was hidden in a locked drawer in my desk. I hoped they'd find it if I passed away and they wouldn't have to suffer because of me.

Better safe than sorry, right? If memory serves, they have a similar proverb abroad... Something along the lines of "Hope for the best and prepare for the worst," I think? Yeah, it sounds much cooler in English. I'll name my next technique after this!

Anyway, I'd somehow managed to deal with the first big crisis. Things would

likely be smooth sailing for a while. There were lovey-dovey events with all of the dateable characters, a few lovers' quarrels sprinkled in here and there, and a few events that made you fail the route if you messed them up, but nothing too bad.

I'd panicked pretty badly when I'd first noticed that Verner was heading straight toward the bodybuilding♂ ending but, now that I thought about it, it wasn't such a bad outcome. Since he'd been ignoring all of the other girls, the only route left for him was Eterna's. Now that I'd successfully convinced him to stop with the bodybuilding♂ route, he'd naturally drift toward the Eterna ending.

Needless to say, the newly discovered Ellize route was completely out of the question. I wasn't gay, all right? So in the very, very, *very* unlikely event that he tried to hit on me, I'd dump his ass. Easy as that.

If he invited me somewhere, I'd just hit him with the world-famous, "Sorry, I don't want my friends to get weird ideas and spread rumors about us." (I didn't have any friends, but did that matter?)

I'll admit I freaked out a bit, but in the end, I managed to get everything under control, didn't I? I'm a genius, what can I say?

Still, I had to stay focused! Verner was the kind of idiot that'd run straight to the solo ending. If I left him alone, I had no clue what stupid things he'd end up doing.

On top of that, there were a few girls who'd die if Verner didn't pick their route. I needed to stay by his side to deal with them as well. If I could see the way things were developing in real-time, I'd be able to lead everyone toward a happy ending.

Which led me back to my initial goal: I had to enroll in the academy.

The witch dwelled in the school's basement, so I'd eventually have to go there anyway.

Oops, another spoiler!

She was hiding out deep under the academy, a few floors under the arena Farah had lured me to. It was basically a hidden dungeon; most professors

didn't even know it existed.

The game was set in the academy, so it also had to end there, didn't it?

Technically, the real reason she was there was because the game developers hadn't bothered to create many maps outside of the academy. While this world and the continent I was currently in had been named—Fiori and Giardino respectively—we barely got to see anything outside of the school.

There were a few events where you took your girlfriend on a date outside of the academy, but you'd get super generic CGs—either some humdrum town background or a picture of the starry sky. The only place where you could move around at will was the academy.

As the player, you had to snoop around to find clues on the witch's location. Ultimately, that meant that since you could only get information inside the school, she had to be there for you to find. If she'd been hiding out in some remote village in another country with no ties to the magic academy, there'd be no way for the player to ever get to her.

Anyway, that was why the witch had been hidden there.

I called Layla and asked her to fill out my admission papers so I could finally enroll in the academy. You might've been wondering why I'd ask one of my guards to do this sort of task. Well, Layla was just as skilled with a pen as she was with a sword. She was basically a superwoman, accomplished in both literary and military arts. She'd definitely fill out the paperwork much faster than I ever could.

Layla's really a good girl. I seriously need to stop calling her Scotterbrain.

"Absolutely not, Lady Ellize."

NOOOO! SCOTTERBRAAAAIN!!!

She cut me off immediately, not even giving me room to get a word in or ask why.

But, hey, I expected this sort of answer.

As I'd pointed out earlier, she absolutely wanted to avoid any potential danger from me wandering out of her sight. Even when she'd hated Ellize and

hoped she'd kick the bucket in the game, she still guarded her with all of her might. After all, if the person she was supposed to protect suddenly died, it would leave a huge stain on her perfect resume.

I knew all that because you got to hear Layla's inner thoughts on her route. On all the other routes, the player was led to believe that she was Ellize's faithful follower up until the moment she betrayed her, but that was far from the truth.

When you finally saw the events from Layla's point of view, you understood how badly she'd suffered under Ellize and how much she hated her. She'd pretended to be loyal to her while insulting her in her head all the time. That was what made her character so interesting—you got to enjoy her serious side on most routes, only to discover that she wasn't like that at all inside.

As a result, Miss Scotterbrain was an incredibly popular character.

Since I knew her so well—her cute, clumsy side included, I also knew exactly what I had to say to convince her.



Layla Scott was the eldest daughter of Marquess Scott, an eminent noble from a proud family of knights. For generations, they had produced skilled members of the saint's guard.

To Layla, her family's honor came before everything else, and from a very young age, she had always hoped to accomplish her duty and secure a position under the direct control of the saint.

What motivated her to follow this path was actually the stories of the minstrels that had used to visit her estate when she was little. They'd play the lyre and wax poetic about the feats of the saints of old and the great knights that protected them. These stories spoke to her in a way little else did. She could imagine herself as the protagonist of these stories and wanted nothing more than to make that dream a reality.

To do so, she'd learned the sword and trained hard to polish her skills. Thankfully, she was talented enough to pursue such a great dream. Before she'd even entered the academy, Layla had surpassed her father—a guard of

the previous saint—and she'd further honed her skills during her studies.

She'd remained at the top of her grade throughout her academic journey, and secured a victory every single time at the bi-annual martial tournament organized to test the students' progress.

When Layla turned twenty, she finally graduated from the Training Institute for Magic Knights of Alfrea as the top student, just like her relatives had hoped. Naturally, she was immediately chosen to join the saint's guard.

Layla was a woman and couldn't inherit the title of marquess. However, by joining the saint's guard, she had snatched an even more glorious position all by herself—one that every wannabe knight envied. Layla had turned her dream into a reality by becoming one of the saint's personal knights.

Despite the lofty position, she continued to hone her skills in hopes that she would be useful to the saint.

She couldn't wait to meet her. What would she be like? She'd be beautiful, definitely. Or perhaps cute? Either way, she'd be just as lovely as the princesses that appeared in fairy tales. Layla was certain of that.

She had actually met the princess of her home country a few times, but she was nothing like the picture-perfect princess she had always dreamed of protecting (*Hey! That's mean, Scotterbrain!*).

She had heard many things about Ellize, the current saint. According to the rumors, she didn't hesitate to fight swarms of monsters by herself and always extended a helping hand to those who needed it. She had even boldly declared that she loved this world itself.

She was said to be the perfect saint.

As it turned out...those rumors had been completely true. No, the real deal was even more perfect than any idle gossip could hope to capture.

Layla had been following her father around and familiarizing herself with the castle when she'd run into the saint for the first time.

"You're the new member of my guard, are you not?"

Every word she spoke, every one of her expressions... She was so pure, so

angelic, so...holy. All of these qualities had come together in the form of a young girl as beautiful as a doll.

She *was* the saint. Layla had no idea how to describe her in any other way.

No words could better embody what a saint ought to be than Ellize herself. No minstrel could ever describe her well enough; their stories would simply pale in the face of reality.

Layla was captivated at first glance. Every time she thought of the fact that she'd get to serve this sacred person, her heart throbbed with joy and excitement.

Ever since Layla had started serving the saint, she felt like she got to witness new miracles every day. Ellize easily routed entire armies of monsters no matter their size, and healed the most difficult of wounds.

Her very existence made the world a brighter place where everyone could smile happily. Just like how the sun illuminated the land with its presence, Ellize's light beamed upon it. She herself was the sun, and the world had never shone brighter than in her presence.

And since that was the kind of person Ellize was, Layla had somehow expected her request.

"Layla, I'm thinking of enrolling in the academy."

"Absolutely not, Lady Ellize."

Now that Ellize knew that the witch's influence had spread to the academy, she wouldn't let it go. Layla understood her reasoning, and she'd been bracing herself for the moment when the saint would bring up this idea.

The previous evening, she had rushed in alone to rescue the students while knowing full well she was walking into a trap, just like Farah—that hateful kidnapper—had asked. Ellize was always like that.

"Layla... I'm sure you understand that I didn't make this decision for no reason. Farah was being controlled by the witch. Did you stop to wonder where the witch could have attacked her? Farah is a zealous teacher. She sleeps in the dorm and rarely ever goes home. You're a fairly recent graduate, so you must

be aware of this.”

“No way...” Layla’s face turned pale.

No way... Lady Ellize, how did you realize this so fast? Please don't say anything else... I know what you'll say to convince me, and if you do... I won't be able to stop you anymore. I won't have any other choice but to allow you to go, even though we both know how dangerous this will be...

“I know full well how smart you are, Layla. You must have understood by now that there is a rather high possibility that the witch is lurking within the academy.”

As I thought... You figured it out too, Lady Ellize...

Layla tried to maintain a straight face—she didn’t want her anguish to be too obvious.

Naturally, she had grasped everything almost immediately after hearing that Farah was being controlled by dark magic. As Ellize had said, the teacher barely ever left the school, which ultimately meant that the witch had to be hiding somewhere in the academy. She had also predicted that Lady Ellize, wise as she was, would soon notice.

“Farah also summoned a large number of monsters,” the saint continued. “She couldn’t have brought them all in from outside. The other teachers are no fools—they would have noticed something was amiss. There were just too many monsters to wave away under the guise of using them for classes or training. If the witch herself is in the academy, however, it’s not such an impossible feat anymore. Farah would have brought in lizards, rats, or birds—animals small enough for no one else to notice. And even if someone *had* seen her with one of those, she could have easily explained it away. Then, the witch would have used her powers to turn them into monsters after they entered the academy, easily creating an army within school grounds.”

Indeed. It's exactly as you say...

The recent events had also convinced Layla that the witch had chosen the academy to conceal herself. And now that Ellize had pointed it out, she could no longer stop her from attending. It was the natural order of things for the saint

to face the witch. No one had the right to prevent this—if anything, to do so was the worst of taboos.

“I’m sure now you understand why I must enroll, Layla,” Ellize finally said.

“If you really must go, then...”

Layla was scared, and terribly so. She was terrified of losing her dear master. None of the saints of the past had survived after defeating the witch.

“Then...” Layla forced herself to finish her sentence. “Let me come with you.”

On the next day, everyone within the Training Institute for Magic Knights of Alfrea—or the magic academy for short—was utterly flabbergasted.

No one had seen it coming. The saint had enrolled herself in the academy?!

Events that would be sure to shake the world were about to unfold...



I was in another dream. It was already the third time, so I was starting to get used to it.

Once again, I was facing my good old—male—body. It was inside my tiny flat, lying down in bed. As usual, I felt as though I was floating around and looking at myself from the outside. I took possession of my body just like I had the previous times.

It might’ve been my imagination, but I felt like moving my limbs was a little harder this time. I didn’t think much of it, though.

All right, this dream is probably going to be as short as the others, so I should hurry up and check the stuff I need to.

I woke my computer from sleep mode and looked for some videos on Ellize’s route. And boy, there were *a bunch* of them.

I clicked on one of the Let’s Plays that had the most views.

It just so happened that it was covering the hostage-taking event, and there was even a fight scene. The player controlled Ellize and had to fight countless monsters; they filled up almost the whole screen.

That being said, it didn’t look like a hard battle at all. Even if you picked your

actions at random, the monsters were getting destroyed one after the other.

I was surprised to hear a BGM track I'd never heard in the game before.

They added an exclusive BGM for one scene? The developers sure fed us well.

Our girl's so OP

One hit's all it takes lmao

Wait, isn't that huge one the last boss on Eterna's route?! lol

God, I remember how freaking hard it was to beat it with Eterna. I suffered so much. lol

Argh! Just seeing it's giving me war flashbacks of how painful it was.

Lady Ellize is just that strong, guys.

Peerless lol

THE DRAGON MELTED. GUYS, I'M WHEEZING!!!

Bruh how's she doing so much damage? Doesn't make any sense.

looooooool. How's anyone supposed to believe she's the fake after that?

These guys were the last boss's summons and I totally remember them being freaking impossible to kill! Why'd they suddenly turn into small fries? lmao

She's not even losing any HP lololololololol

Cuz the saint can't take damage if she or the witch aren't the ones attacking lol

Dude, the monsters are using the witch's magic. Even the actual saint should lose HP...

To think one hit from these monsters destroys 30% of lvl

99 Verner's HP in one go.

Tbh it's a good thing Ellize isn't the saint. She's way too OP lmao

She could just clear the whole storyline alone, couldn't she? Who needs the other characters?

The comment section was full of people losing it over Ellize's unparalleled fighting abilities.

Oh wow. So that's how strong I am, huh? I look even more impressive in the game, don't I?

Diligently training every day on top of having with Ellize's insane natural talent had been well worth it.

It didn't look like Ellize participated in the fighting at all in the other routes considering the comments. I assumed she probably took care of some monsters automatically during some of the events, but you never got to play her in a fight unless you were on her route.

When the player wrapped up the fight, the rest of the event unfolded just as I'd remembered it, and Ellize stopped Layla's blade with her arm.

Omg! I almost believed Ellize was the real saint all along when I first saw that sceeeene!

I also thought she was the saint but no she's just a monster lmao

Ikrrrrrrr w/her stats Scotterbrain's just way too weak to deal any damage to her

Think, Scotterbrain, think!!! She's not the saint, she's just freaking OP!

It felt kind of...hm, how should I put it...*refreshing* to see people commenting on my actions from the outside.

The event eventually ended, and Ellize was dragged home. After that, we were treated to a few minutes of Verner living a peaceful school life. Two days passed by, and then...the comments went crazy again.

Why, you ask? Well, because a CG had popped up. And not just any CG either—it was Ellize standing in front of Verner's class, dressed in a uniform.

LADY EL'S ACADEMY ARC YESSSSSS!!!

YES PLEASE!

It's my first time seeing this lmao

Omfg, she's sooooo beautiful in this uniform.

It was literally made for Lady El!

No one found this route for four years and now everyone's going batshit crazy on this one CG lol

Why's my CG collection at 100%?! I never got this one!

>The 100%'s a lie.

>If you go to check the CG collection after you start Ellize's route, you'll notice that the 100%/100% becomes 100%/150%

The devs are super sneaky huh?

The video ended right after the CG appeared, and the next part had yet to be uploaded.

I hadn't been certain up until now, but...the game's content really *had* changed depending on my actions.

Well, maybe not. There're no guarantees real-life Japan is being impacted at all. I'm just dreaming, after all...or am I?

It was the third time I'd found myself in front of my old body; I was starting to doubt that these were just regular old dreams.

Anyway, next I had to check Ellize's page. *I wonder if anything's changed.*

The beginning was the exact same as before; not even a word had changed. However, some sentences—toward the end of what I’d read last time—had completely disappeared from the main text. Now, you had to click to “view spoilers.”

Ellize’s true identity:

Ellize is not the real saint. She was switched with Eterna at birth and is only a commoner. Naturally, she cannot wield the saint’s magic needed to defeat the witch.

The reason why Ellize looks eternally fourteen is due to absorbing part of the witch’s magic to help Verner control his powers. As a result, her life span has been shortened.

Ellize is able to purge the witch’s powers by making use of the dark magic she got from Verner. The reason why she wasn’t hurt by Layla during the Farah event was thanks to her high stats. On top of that, she is able to protect her body from harm by concentrating her mana around it.

Ellize is so good at passing for the saint that no one—including the witch—ever suspects her of being a fake.

As for Ellize herself, she’s aware of her situation from the very start, and she’s ready to return Eterna’s rightful spot to her at any time.

Game events:

- In Ellize’s route:

A mysterious route discovered four years after the game came out.

Conditions to start the route:

Complete the CG collection.

Start a new save.

On your first run, keep the item “Pendant of Memories” on you until the seventeenth day.

After you enter the academy, fill every free time slot with “independent training” until the end of the seventeenth day. (The other heroines’ affection level must be at base value.)

If all the conditions are complete, there is a low chance Ellize will visit you on the night of the seventeenth day. She will tell you how worried she is that you haven’t made any friends and you will get the chance to increase her affection level. (Unless you clear this event, Ellize will not become a dateable character and her affection level will not appear on the screen.)

The probability Ellize will visit you on the seventeenth day is around 0.3% according to the latest data.

According to some players, prioritizing muscle-building will increase the chance of Ellize visiting you, but this information has yet to be verified.

To ensure you can start the route, save before the last training session of the seventeenth day and reload as many times as needed.

On the eighteenth day, an event where Farah takes the main character, Eterna, Fiora, John, and a few background characters hostage will be triggered.

Farah will demand that Ellize comes alone, and Ellize will comply.

After she arrives, a fight against Farah’s monsters will start. This is the first time the player gets to play Ellize.

Overpowering Farah’s monsters will be incredibly easy because of Ellize’s high stats. While some players thought

Ellize's impressive strength in other routes didn't make sense, her stats certainly seem to align with the feats she's accomplished until now.

Over thirty monsters that are impossible to defeat on the first playthrough in other routes will appear, but Ellize can kill them with one hit.

The fight appears to be impossible to lose regardless of the choices the player makes.

Two days after this event concludes, Ellize will make a surprising announcement and enroll in the academy.

(Please reach out if you have any information to share.)

That was all. A lot had been added since the last time I read through this page.

Goes to show how badly everyone is obsessed with Ellize's route.

I took a look at the image gallery, and the number of illustrations of Ellize had grown exponentially. I couldn't believe it.

Of course, even before I'd taken over Ellize, a few people had drawn her from time to time. Those pieces had been scarce, though, and most of the time they showed her getting beaten up by other characters. The comment section would be full of people laughing at her and saying she deserved it.

No one would have ever dared to draw her as cute and lovely as the images I was looking at right now.

I continued to look things up and discovered there were quite a lot of doujinshi and fanfics online too. *Kuon no Sanka* had always been a popular series among fan artists, but, uh...stories with Ellize as the main character definitely hadn't existed in the past.

I opened a famous fanfiction website and decided to check out the latest story. The title was "The Guardian of the Fake Flower."

I wonder what it's all about...?

The Guardian of the Fake Flower

Author: D4rkxDivinexDragon

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Chapter 1: Beginnings

My name is D4rkxDivinexDragon. I'm a normal high school boy. I don't really realize it myself but most girls giggle and swoon when they see me. I guess I must be very handsome.

I'm good at sports and I'm the smartest person I know. I also save people whenever they get bullied. It's no big deal, but somehow everyone loves me.

One day I woke up and...I was standing in a large plain I'd never seen before. I noticed that I was in the world of Kuon no Sanka!!!

Now that I was here...I had to change the warped fate of this world and fight to protect Ellize!

I trained like crazy for a while and I became the super strongest fighter in the world.

Now that I was the strongest in the world, I went to the saint's castle.

When I arrived, someone said, "Who are you?" and the guards tried to stop me.

I started beating them up so I could pass. I easily sent them flying. Did those weaklings think I was going to go easy on them?

Then the king of the country suddenly arrived and stood in my way. I knew he was evil! I knew everything about this world. The whole truth. He had to be stopped and die by my hand.

“Shut up,” I said.

I cut his head off with my sword.

Then I went to Ellize’s room.

“Who are you?” Ellize said.

“I’m here to protect you,” I said while caressing her cheek softly.

“Protect...me...?”

Why is my heart beating so fast?! Could it be...Love???!!! Ellize thought.

For some reason, Ellize turned bright red. What was wrong with her?

That was how Ellize and I met.

How did I find myself in the world of the scattering flowers? And what would I achieve here?

I closed the tab without a word.

What...what had I just read? Did I look like the kind of guy to fall madly in love with the first idiot who trespassed into my room and suddenly touched my face with his grubby hands?

Yeah, no. Not happening. And dude, did you really have to give the main character your own username...?

Why did we suddenly get Ellize’s inner thoughts even though he was writing in the first person the whole time? *Can your character read people’s minds? Is that it?*

I didn’t feel like checking out other people’s fanfics anymore after this.

Instead, I read through some threads about *Kuon no Sanka*. Most people were talking about Ellize, and the threads were full of comments like these:

Lady Ellize is the purest!!!

A better saint than the original!

I managed to get to the moment where she transfers to the academy!

I *did* spend my time pretending to be the perfect saint, but I couldn't help but feel weird when I saw people speaking about me like this... Not that I could do much about it.

Even if I suddenly hit reply and told them the truth, they'd just think I was some crazy hater.

Keep getting played by that empty shell of a saint, guys.

Though, honestly, I just wished people would stop choking the chicken while looking at artworks of Ellize—it made my skin crawl.

I'm sure you guys would be disgusted too. I'm still a dude inside, you know?

I could already see them getting disappointed at the end of Ellize's route, their hopes and dreams crushed and then trampled into the carpet again for good measure.

I promise you'll regret it. You should stop while you're ahead. Oh, hey—looks like it's time to go back to the other world.

I had been sitting at my desk, but I suddenly found myself floating over my body again.

I know this is a dream, but can my point of view please stop shifting like this? It doesn't make any sense. I sighed. *Bye-bye, original body, and hello, Ellize.*

Chapter 8: Beyond His Wildest Dreams

Good morniiiiiiiiiiiiing! Your most-despicable idol, Ellize, is back for another show! I'll rise toward the sky like a mighty mountain of turds and fill the hearts of all my lovely haters with enough love...that they'll explode! Are you ready? Teehee!

Damn... I'd gone with the flow and greeted my imaginary audience, but it was so extra that I ended up making myself want to puke. I needed to stop doing this sort of stuff even when I was in a good mood in the morning. Actually, I needed to stop doing it, period. What if someone walked in on me? I'd have to off myself on the spot.

It was probably a needless worry, though, since no one ever entered my room without my permission. I always cast a barrier before going to bed, and even the members of my guard couldn't get in while I was asleep. Needless to say, my barrier also blocked sounds perfectly.

Why did I bother doing that? Well, the answer was simple: even if I was doing a great job at this whole being-a-cute-girl business, I was still a man inside. And I had no way of controlling what I did or said while I was sleeping. What if I blurted out stuff like, "come on, suck it, baby!" or "yes, tiddies!" in my sleep? I wouldn't even know I'd said it!

Anyway, that was why I always made sure to set up a barrier. It was one of the first spells I'd worked on—a few days of crunch time had been enough to master it.

My morning routine was always the same. First, I checked my appearance in the mirror. My hair was silky smooth, and my skin supple and unblemished thanks to my magic. I also made sure my body stayed in perfect shape.

The next step was to further enhance my looks with some more magic. I made my hair shine by having it reflect light in an ethereal way. I made it look like a halo was always sparkling at the top of my head. I also made my skin glow—literally.

Since I was a man inside, I had to make sure that my appearance remained cute enough to trick everyone. And boy, was it hard work!

I'd been pretending to be the saint for twelve years now, and it was starting to get really old. I was sure I'd eventually slip up. I couldn't wait for Eterna to reclaim her rightful position so I could make my exit.

Ideally, when the time came, I wanted to go hide in some woods deep in the mountains. I'd build a little log house and live the rest of my life taking it easy, surrounded by nature.

But I'd have to put that off for now. If I wanted to see everyone's happy ending with my own two eyes before I retired, I'd have to meticulously craft the *perfect* plan.

First, I had to save the heroines that would pass away unless Verner picked their routes...which he obviously wasn't going to do.

There were three of them in the academy.

The first was the witch. I honestly didn't give a shit about her, and I had no qualms about her dying off miserably. She was everyone else's sworn enemy anyway.

I needed to save the other two, though.

One of them was a sickly girl, so I could most likely help her myself. Not to brag, but my healing magic was much stronger than pretty much every type of medicine in this world. I had yet to come across an ailment I couldn't cure. As long as I got to see her, it wouldn't be hard to save her.

The other girl was called Aina Fox, a redhead that always styled her hair in pig tails. She came from a fallen viscount house. In the original game, her family had fallen to ruin before the start of the main story because of... Wait for it... Yes! Ellize!

Aina's parents had tried to advise Ellize against resorting to violence as often as she did. Naturally, she hadn't been too happy about being called out, so she'd retaliated, destroying their house and social standing. That *still* hadn't been enough for Ellize, though. She'd relentlessly continued to harass the family until she'd successfully driven everyone to their death. Well... Everyone but

Aina. She was the only one to survive, thanks to her parents' friends taking her in.

The original Ellize was never up to any good, was she?

Obviously, Aina hated Ellize's guts. She'd entered the academy with the sole purpose of assassinating the fake saint. Her goal had been to get good enough grades to join the saint's guard, then wait for the perfect opportunity to strike.

However, as I'd already mentioned before, Ellize often visited the academy to scheme and bully the students.

This pushed Aina to discard her carefully crafted plan, and she ended up trying to murder Ellize out of the blue instead. Oh yeah! I remembered Ellize squealing like a pig in fear. *Ha ha ha ha! Good times.*

Anyway, Layla was protecting Ellize at the time, so she'd easily overpowered Aina. The would-be murderer was taken away, thrown in jail, and sentenced to death the following day.

The whole affair ended up having wide repercussions on the story, though.

To begin with, Layla suffered from knowing that a promising young girl had to die because she'd arrested her. She felt like she was indirectly responsible for her death.

The biggest issue of all, though, was that Aina's blade had managed to cut Ellize. The saint—who should've been invincible unless the witch was involved—had been hurt. It should've been an impossible scenario, and it was what had eventually led to Ellize finally being exposed as the fake she was.

After that, Layla betrayed Ellize, publishing the documents she'd carefully gathered to prove her evil deeds. The scar Aina had left on her, in addition to Layla's evidence, left little room for doubt. Soon, everyone came to believe that Ellize was indeed a fake.

All in all, Aina did the most work to expose Ellize before dying.

On every route other than her own, that was all we knew of her. She hadn't done much otherwise, so the player only remembered her as "that one girl who attacked Ellize."

The first half of her route was pretty much the same, but since Verner liked her, he decided to join her attack on Ellize, and a fight against Layla would be triggered. If you managed to win that fight, you'd be able to wound Ellize and expose her without letting Aina die.

After that event, Aina and Verner would be on the run for a while to avoid prosecution for attacking the saint. However, Layla would soon betray Ellize and she'd fall to her ruin. Aina and Verner would then be free to return to the academy.

Now, the main question was... Would Aina attack me at all? I hadn't done anything to the Fox family, so she shouldn't have had any reason to hate me.

Despite that, the core principles of the game might've been set in stone; maybe she'd still start to despise me just because she was supposed to and attack me out of the blue. I couldn't really do much to prevent that if that was just how the world worked.

Even if she *did* attack me, I was confident I could easily stop her without getting hurt; then I'd just have to insist she shouldn't be sentenced to death.

I guess Aina's case is also pretty much settled.

Was there anything else I needed to pay attention to? *Hmm... The witch-related events, I guess.*

In the game, the witch had realized pretty early on that Eterna was the real saint and had sometimes launched attacks using monsters to try to get to her. There had always been a few casualties during those events.

The thing was...the witch here obviously hadn't noticed I was a fake. Farah'd had Eterna in her grasp. The teacher could've easily killed her if she wanted to, but she'd only used her as a hostage to draw me out.

Could the witch be...much dumber than I thought? How could she not tell who the true saint was?

I could understand the case for regular people, but the witch was supposed to be fated to fight the saint. She should've noticed the difference immediately, right?

Her stupidity did give me an advantage, though.

To be honest, her carelessness meant I could kill the witch at any time.

I knew exactly where she was hiding, and I was pretty confident that I was stronger than her. While I wouldn't do as much damage without the saint's magic, I could get to her with the dark magic I'd absorbed from Verner. On the other hand, I had a feeling the witch wouldn't be able to do much to me.

In the game, you could defeat her with Verner alone once he'd reached level 70. And if you had Eterna in your party, being level 40 was already more than enough.

As for me, well...if what I saw in that video was anything to go by, my current strength easily exceeded Verner's, even at level 99. I'd easily erased monsters that he would've struggled to fight.

I was fairly confident that if I were to fight the witch, she wouldn't even be able to reach me as long as I used a barrier. Sure, I'd have to deal with a huge damage penalty, but I'd still be able to hurt her. She, on the other hand, wouldn't even be able to land a scratch on me. Even if it took me a little longer than with regular monsters, I'd eventually finish her. I simply couldn't lose.

Imagine a level 99 Fire-type fighting a level 5 Water-type.

That said, I couldn't go kill the witch right now. Even if I were the one to do it, I had to wait until after Eterna got her happy ending.

If the witch herself came out to attack people, I'd just drive her away.

Anyway, that meant I was pretty much done deciding my next course of action.

First, I'd look for the sick girl and heal her as soon as possible. As for Aina Fox, I'd ask Layla to look into her and wait for her to make the first move. If she came to kill me, I'd handle it somehow.

That's a good plan, if I dare say so myself! Guess it's time to dispel my barrier.

Layla entered my room after knocking on the door. "Good morning, Lady Ellize."

She'd followed me to the academy to keep me safe. As always, she was put-

together and looked both dignified and elegant.

What kind of idiot would dare to call such a beauty Scotterbrain? Ah, wait... It's me. I'm the idiot.

Anyway, mean nicknames aside, Scotterbrain accompanied me to my classroom. As I walked through the corridors, students and teachers alike stopped to stare at me and whispered among themselves.

I'm starting to feel like a celebrity. Yes, good! Lower your heads! Bow down to me, peasants! Wait, most students here are nobles. If anything, I'm the peasant... I got it. I'll lower my own head, sorry.

Jokes aside, it did feel good to be the center of attention—like I was some big shot or something. I was starting to understand how Ellize had turned out the way she had, given all the attention she'd been lavished with from the start. I didn't intend to make excuses for her, though—she was still a piece of trash.

Still, it got me wondering—would Eterna have grown into such a compassionate person if she had been in Ellize's shoes? Maybe she would've turned out just as selfish and violent as Ellize...

I believed that everyone was born pure and good, just like a blank sheet of paper. The environment which people grew up in determined what kind of colors would be added. Using that philosophy, though...maybe the original Ellize had been nothing but a victim in the end.

Oh, are you wondering what color I am? My sheet of paper was pitch-black from the start, baby! You could add as much color as you wanted to it, but it'd still be black! That was why I was still the same piece of shit even after I was reincarnated.

Anyway, I finally arrived in front of my classroom. Now I just had to walk in, but...there was some guy kneeling in front of the door and blocking the way!

Who the hell's this weirdo?!

"How dare you obstruct Lady Ellize's way!" Scotterbrain cried.

She tried to confront the man, but I stopped her in a hurry.

What're you doing, Scotterbrain?! Everyone's gonna think I'm an arrogant villainess! What were you planning to do next—stab him for having the gall to block my path? Are you trying to set me up so that everyone believes I'm a scoundrel, huh?! Is that it?

“Ah, you're even more beautiful up close... I was awaiting your arrival. What an honor to welcome you to our academy...” the man said emotionally.

Okay, but who are you, dude?

I took a closer look, but I still had no clue who he could've been. Well, not that I remembered a whole lot of male characters in the first place, but yeah...

He seemed to be...in his midtwenties, I guess? He had such an elegant face that it pissed me off—slanted eyes, a nice high-bridged nose, and a delicate, oval bone structure. His long, jet-black hair was tied in a low ponytail, and his bangs were swept back, save for one lone strand that fell over his forehead. A pair of modern glasses were resting on his nose—which made little sense considering the settings of this world, but sure—and gave him the air of an intellectual.

He looked like the kind of dude that befriended the hero only to betray him later on.

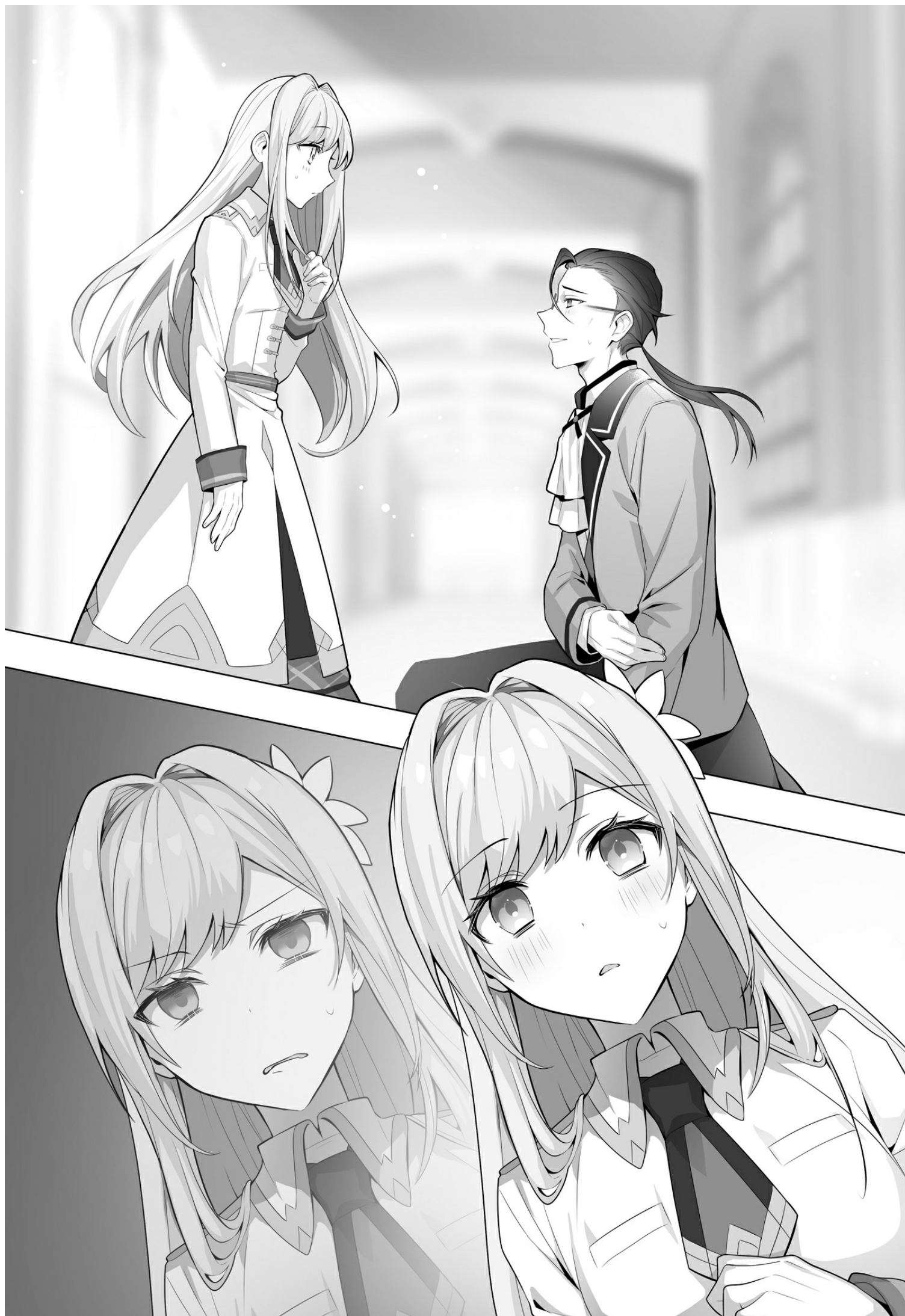
Was he in the game? I have a feeling he was... But then again, maybe he wasn't...

I had no choice. I'd have to rely on my secret method—ask Scotterbrain!

I shot a glance her way, and she immediately understood me. She cleared her throat before introducing the mystery man.

“This is the teacher, Mr. Supple Ment.”

Oh, I remember him now. He's one of the bad guys.



Supple Ment, the twenty-five-year-old teacher. The person in charge of writing him couldn't think of any good names, so he'd casually named him that after seeing a bottle of supplements on his desk.

The players had nicknamed him "Four-Eyed Pervert." He ended up facing the player as an enemy on every single route, though honestly, he wasn't really an important villain.

He was a fervent supporter of the saint and always tried to push his fantasies and delusions onto others. He'd noticed pretty early on that Ellize wasn't the real deal and had never worshiped her, reasoning that someone like her simply couldn't be the glorious saint.

I mean, he ended up being right, but...

He became relevant to the plot after Ellize had been taken care of. Once it became clear that Ellize had lied to everyone, he set out on a quest to find the real saint, the one that would be worthy of his worship.

At that point, he'd stalk, kidnap, and proselytize whichever heroine had the highest affection level with Verner. The man was, in a nutshell, an annoying creep.

Either way, his ideal saint only existed inside his head. Regardless of who he ended up abducting, he was never satisfied.

He'd grumble things like, "The saint would never say something like that," or, "the saint wouldn't act this way," before trying to force the girl he'd abducted to act like the figure he idolized. By the way, that exact storyline unfolded even if he kidnapped Eterna—the *actual* saint. Even the real deal couldn't compare to whatever image he'd conjured in his head and placed on a pedestal.

After a while, Verner would come to rescue his girl and beat the weirdo up. Supple Ment would be forced to leave the academy forever.

To think they let such a bastard be a teacher... What's the world coming to? Whatever, he's no big deal anyway. I'll keep an eye on him; that should be more than enough.

I'd drive him out of the story the moment he started acting funny.



She was beyond his wildest dreams.

Supple Ment worshiped the saint. She was everything to him, and he considered himself her most zealous supporter.

When he was a child, the world had been a living hell. Monsters had been everywhere, and people had died by the thousands. Those who'd been "lucky" enough to survive lost their humanity and reason, leading them to act like crazed demons even lower than the beasts.

Those were the beings that had really terrified them. After all, when a beast attacked a person, there was no ill will behind it. When they attacked, there was always a reason for their actions, whether it was to eat, to protect themselves—or their territories, their young. Regardless, there was always *something* that drove them, either through needs or fear.

However, the people who lost their humanity and their reason weren't like that. They didn't need a rational cause to hurt others, and even worse than that, they took *pleasure* in others' suffering.

They were evil beasts, nothing but monsters.

As fate would have it, Supple's home had been attacked by those very monsters.

The Ment house was a baron family, but they weren't particularly well-off—they simply ruled over a domain. When they were attacked by an angry mob after an uprising, they naturally didn't have the means to hire enough soldiers or mercenaries to defend themselves.

Their mansion had been turned upside down, the servants had run away, and young Supple had witnessed his father and brother's murders and his mother and sister's rapes.

Beasts... These people are beasts, the boy had thought. There was no way they could be human like himself—they were simply wearing men's skins.

Supple had managed to narrowly escape the angry mob, but his spirit had never recovered.

While he hadn't had a lavish upbringing, he still hailed from a noble house. He'd never seen the ugliness of the world before that day. It had been enough to break him.

Justice, love, compassion, moderation, kindness, sympathy, responsibility, courage... All of the virtues that had been so diligently instilled into him now sounded like empty lies. After all, those people had oh-so-easily turned into those hideous creatures—no, hideous monsters. They'd been quick to discard their values and reveal their true nature, smiling only to conceal the ugliness of their souls.

The person who had finally righted his twisted world was the saint of that era, who had defeated the witch and had brought back the light.

Supple had been astonished to see the once-monstrous people suddenly recover their reason and put on their masks of humanity again.

He had never met the saint, but a statement had immediately struck him—the saint was the only one who could illuminate the world and right every wrong!

The saint was light, and with that light came all of the virtues of the world! Justice, love, compassion, moderation, kindness, sympathy, responsibility, courage... The saint embodied all of these at once! No, the saint *was* virtue *itself*!

Since he'd never seen the saint, he tried imagining her. She was probably the most beautiful woman in the world. No, not probably—he was certain of it! She *had* to be the most beautiful and the most precious, both inside and out. She couldn't possibly be tainted by any ugliness.

In the heart of the young broken boy, his twisted conclusions had made perfect sense. Anyone would have thought Supple's thoughts were selfish. Who was he to decide what the saint had to be like? However, no one ever corrected his twisted thoughts... Or rather, no one ever noticed them. Why? Well, the answer was rather simple: no one understood how to wear a mask better than him.

If there was anything Supple had learned from the hideous monsters of his childhood, it was how to conceal his true self. He knew how to make himself

look good, how to convince everyone he was a gentle person. And he didn't hesitate to wear that facade.

A few years passed like that until once again, as always, another witch appeared.

The cycle was always the same. No one knew why, but a saint and a witch would appear without fail every generation. Each time the saint defeated the witch, she would disappear without leaving so much as a corpse behind. Then, about five years later, another witch would appear to replace her, and the saint would follow a few years after that. They never appeared at the exact same time.

While the witch always appeared as an adult, the saint was reborn as a baby. Although they technically appeared at around the same time, it would take the saint at least fifteen years to be ready to face her fated opponent.

As a result, there was no one to stop the witch until the saint was fully grown, so she was free to do as she pleased during that time.

That meant that each time the cycle completed, people had a mere five years of peace before the witch went on a rampage again. Then they'd have to wait for another saint to rise up against the witch and bring about another short-lived peace. Thus it continued endlessly—a mere five years of peace followed by at least fifteen years of terror under the witch's rule.

There was one exception, however: when the saint failed to defeat the witch and died. The saint did not always triumph over the witch—far from it.

While the saint couldn't be hurt by regular means, the witch was very much capable of killing her if she wasn't strong enough to kill the witch first. There were also a few cases in which the saints hadn't been able to withstand the pressure of their position and had killed themselves. Others had been corrupted by the witch's powers and became her servants. Finally, some had simply been killed by monsters sent by the witch.

When such things happened, the rule of the witch would be prolonged, and many would fall into depravity.

In fact, before the world had been saved when Supple was a child—two saints before Ellize’s generation, in other words—that exact scenario had happened. The saint of the time had been slain by a monster without even being able to reach the witch.

That was why the saint was such a precious being, why everyone held her so dear to their hearts.

While the saint from two generations ago had been a failure, the complete reverse had happened in this generation. Ellize, the greatest saint in history, had appeared.

By the time she was five, she was fully conscious of her duties, and by the time she was ten, she’d already started her work. She hunted monsters, saved whoever she could reach, and broke through the darkness like no one else had before her.

The witch had gone into hiding, and her powers had grown noticeably weaker. Everyone assumed that the witch—the greatest symbol of fear—was actually scared of Ellize instead.

For once, the witch era had been cut short. Ever since Ellize had started making her move, peace had returned to the land, and the situation remained surprisingly stable.

Supple had once gone out of his way in hopes of witnessing her glorious figure. He’d headed to an area where monsters tended to appear and just as he’d wished, he’d seen her fight.

She was perfect—no, beyond perfect. She’d far surpassed any image his lacking, feeble brain could’ve ever imagined. She was truly beyond his wildest dreams.

Supple’s selfish ideals had vanished in an instant, and for the first time in many years, he willingly looked at reality instead of his delusions.

The world he’d long thought beyond saving didn’t look ugly anymore—it was beautiful and full of light.

A strong light finally cleared his sight. People who’d once looked like monsters in his eyes suddenly seemed different, he realized. In fact, he had the epiphany

that his twisted heart, which had been overrun by dark emotions, had been the true source of the bleakness he saw everywhere. His heart felt light, as if a pleasant breeze was dancing inside his chest.

He didn't need to run away anymore, nor was he the kind of man he'd once been who'd lost himself in his ideals. Instead, he'd been replaced by a man who was ready to face the world for what it truly was and walk the path of righteousness.

"I'm Ellize. Exceptional circumstances have led me to enroll in the academy. I will only be here for a rather short time, but I do hope we'll all get along nicely."

Her appearance was a bolt out of the blue. If Supple's everyday life had been a rainy day, then Ellize's arrival at the academy was like a flash of lightning that had suddenly cleared the stormy clouds and revealed a clear blue sky.

Supple had been overjoyed at the news. The saint...studying at the academy! He'd get to see her! He'd get to exist in the same space as she did!

Now that he'd gotten to see her up close, he realized all over again just how much better she was compared to the "perfect" saint he'd spent all of those years carefully constructing in his head.

In fact, she'd even healed a sickly girl she hadn't known after passing her by once in the corridors.

"Excuse me... Are you feeling sick? Your face looks a little pale... Here you go, you should feel better now. What did you say? You wish to thank me? There's no need—your gratitude is more than enough. I healed you simply because I wanted to, so you don't owe me anything. Really."

Supple had recognized the student.

While her grades for written tests were decent, she was absolutely hopeless when it came to practical exams. He'd heard that the girl suffered from a heart ailment. Whenever she overexerted herself, she had to rest for a long time, unable to move. Despite her huge handicap, she'd managed to successfully enter this school. That alone showed how much potential she had, and Supple couldn't help but think it was a pity for such a promising student to be unable to perform well because of her health.

Healing magic usually was powerless to cure heart ailments. Only a very valuable medicine—made of mandragora, dragon scales, and griffin feathers—could do anything against such illness. The ingredients were very difficult to come by, and as a result, it was both expensive and also incredibly scarce. After all, no one could make it if no one managed to find the ingredients in the first place.

Supple often wondered if the girl was trying to become strong in the hopes that she'd find these ingredients herself one day. Was she devoting whatever was left of her life to this quest?

Sadly...he knew she'd never survive long enough to succeed. Even if she *did* hold on until she became a knight, the medicine ingredients weren't easy to gather, even for full-fledged knights...let alone a newcomer.

However, the saint had easily cured her serious illness as if it had been nothing more than a mere cold.

The girl had been overcome with emotion. She'd almost fallen to her knees, trembling and sobbing, but the saint had simply gathered her in her arms and held her. The green-haired student was taller than the saint, but she looked like a child in her comforting embrace.

"How precious..." the man whispered to himself before feeling his mind turn blank.

When he'd finally come back to his senses, the saint had long left. Supple regretted not being able to gaze upon her longer. Actually, it was more that he felt so moved that he didn't know what to do with himself.

Ah! Ah! How beautiful the world is! How full of light!

Reality truly *had* surpassed his ideals.

Supple didn't know why the saint had decided to come to this school, but he was certain she had a very important reason for her actions.

Then I'll support her with everything I have! I'll do everything I can to help her fulfill her goal! Supple Ment vowed in his heart.

He gazed up at the sky and began to pray with a frenzied expression on his

face. Needless to say, it wasn't a flattering look—he came off kind of gross—and the students that passed him by in the corridor took great care to avoid him.

Chapter 9: Deepening Misunderstanding

As it turned out, the sick girl I'd healed was the type who had her curves hidden by clothing. I could still feel the warmth of her body and the plumpness of her chest on mine as I walked through the corridors.

Perks of the job.

Anyway, that was one thing to cross off my to-do list.

I'd casually run into her while walking around, so I'd quickly healed her to get it over with.

Seriously, why are the doctors of this world wasting precious ingredients to cure stuff like this? It's a total mystery. I guess their incompetence let me experience something fun.

When the sick girl broke down crying after my super heal, I saw my opportunity and took it. I was more than happy to give her a nice hug, gently combing my fingers through her hair and pretending to comfort her while enjoying the feeling of her body against mine. *Hye he he he!*

"Here you are, Lady Ellize."

Would you look at that—it was Mister Main Character Verner and Miss Heroine Eterna together!

You two have no idea how happy it makes me to see you walk together with smiles plastered on your faces. I'm not like those bitter loners who want happy couples to explode and die off.

Why? Because little Verner there was nothing but the incarnation of the player. In other words...my own incarnation! In a way, when Verner flirted with Eterna, it was like I was flirting with her.

Huh? I'm deluding myself? Of course not! That's what dating sims are all about! You have to empathize with the main character so you can date the girls through him! That's the whole point!

That was why I'd never be jealous of Verner. If anything, I'd always be happy to help him get the girl.

Grasp that happy ending and live happily ever after, all right? That's the only way I can die peacefully.

Anyway... Eterna looked a little off today. Was she worried about something?

I'm happy to hear you out anytime, darling.

"I... N-No need, I'm all right," she said.

Are you sure you're all right? You really look down. Did Verner neglect you again? Dude, you need to take care of the girl you like instead of exercising all the time!

"I-I'm still exercising, but I promise I've stopped spending all my time doing it. And, hmm...the girl I like isn't... Never mind. May I ask you why you decided to enroll in the academy, Lady Ellize?"

I see, you can't help but be curious, can you? What should I do? Should I tell you? I'm a nice person, so I guess I'll tell you...but you have to keep my secret, okay?

The two of them were kind of related to the main plot—actually, they were the main characters—so I figured they had a right to know. The sooner they knew, the safer they'd be if anything happened.

I made sure Verner understood he couldn't go around telling everyone about what I was about to disclose, then explained that the witch was most likely hiding in the academy.

"Th-The witch is...inside this academy?!"

Figured you'd be surprised.

I couldn't tell them exactly *where* she was, because I didn't want them trying anything rash, so I decided to make it seem like I hadn't pinpointed her exact location. Naturally, I'd actually known where she was from the moment I'd opened my eyes in this world, but they didn't need to know that.

Hye he he he! I'll teach the witch true dread by following her closely. She's not getting a moment of peace! Show me your expression when you're terrified,

witch!

The last boss'd always looked so high and mighty in the game. Getting to see her crying and begging would make my day.

"The witch..."

Eterna, why do you look scared? I wanted to see the witch cower in fear, not you!

Did she freak out because she was so close to the witch?

There's no need to be so scared, sweetheart! I'll make sure you and Verner are safe. I'm here to defeat the damn witch and protect you, so don't sweat it! Killing her will be a walk in the park for me!

After I'd said something along those lines, Eterna's face turned pale, and she ran away without another word.

Did I do something wrong?

I shot a glance at Verner and Layla, hoping to get an answer from them, but they looked just as puzzled as me.

What the hell?

I had absolutely no clue why Eterna had suddenly run off. Was she scared of me? But why?!

I wasn't like the original Ellize. I'd never bullied her. Hell, I'd even saved her when Farah had taken her hostage. Even if she didn't *like* me, there was no reason for her to hate me, was there?!

Actually, I could think of a few possible reasons.

Maybe she'd noticed the lustful glances I tended to throw at girls' chests, and she'd gotten grossed out and run off.

I was also playing a role as the saint. Maybe she could see my true nature, hidden under layers of acting, and hated me because of that.

Either way, I had a feeling she *should* be more grossed out than scared. She hadn't looked like she despised me...rather, it'd been like she was afraid I'd hurt her.

Did Eterna ever react like that in the game? She did!

The end of the game changed slightly depending on the route you were on. Usually, the last boss was either the witch or Eterna. When Eterna was the last boss, it was actually possible to finish the game without fighting the witch at all—she'd just die off-screen. Eterna, accompanied by a bunch of knights, would defeat her while Verner wasn't there (hence why the player didn't get to see it). If you were to try talking to her after that had happened, she'd show a similar kind of frightened reaction.

But that event was meant to happen much later. There was no reason for her to act so scared while the witch was still alive.

Wait! Had Eterna killed the witch without my knowing?!

No, that didn't make any sense. Actually, it was impossible.

While there *was* a storyline where Eterna went off to kill the witch on her own, that only happened in the second half of the game. On top of that, she had to use tons of knights as cannon fodder to protect herself during the fight. It resulted in a large number of casualties.

Oh, spoiler alert—depending on the choices the player had made up until this point, Layla could end up being one of those casualties.

At any rate, Eterna had to be at least level 40 for the event to be triggered.

Unless she was strong enough and had enough cannon fodder to keep herself alive, she shouldn't be able to beat the witch. That meant there was absolutely *no* way the current Eterna could defeat her alone. If she were to try her luck, she'd be the one to die instead.

I tried to remember why Eterna was even scared in that route.

It was because... Oh, right! I remember now! It's a spoiler, but...meh, I guess it's not the first one I've let slip. I'll just go ahead.

The long and short of it was: her fear was because she'd learned the terrible truth that the witch and saint were, in fact, one and the same. There were absolutely no differences between the witch and the saint.

That was why they both had the same characteristics, and why they could

only be hurt by their own powers as well as the other's.

Verner's dark powers worked on the witch because, at the end of the day, the nature of his powers were the same as the saint's.

The thing was, after a saint defeated the witch, the deep grudge etched inside the witch's heart was somehow transferred to the saint. That saint then ended up becoming the next witch.

There had never been a proper explanation as to what the whole grudge thing was, but according to a popular fan theory, it was a part of the very first witch's soul... Or rather, it was a curse set up by the first witch to transfer her hatred to the one that had killed her. And since only the saint could defeat the witch, it only ever affected them.

That was how, after defeating the witch herself, Eterna had ended up becoming the next one. Then she'd reappeared as the last boss.

In fact, the current witch was also Eterna's predecessor—well, what remained of her, at least.

As you'd probably figured out by now, saying that the saint "died" after defeating the witch was actually a lie. The truth was that the saint would hide herself while the royal family pretended that she'd died in order to conceal the terrible secret. The reason why there was a five-year gap between the death of a witch and the appearance of the next one was because the saint was only able to hold on to her sanity for about that long.

By that point, it would also become impossible for the saint to kill herself to avoid her inevitable fate. While her powers would still work on herself, and it technically *was* possible, her survival instinct would become too strong for her to bypass on her own—dark magic always tried to keep its wielder alive. No matter how badly she'd wish to, she wouldn't be able to take her own life. A saint who'd had yet to inherit that magic could commit suicide, though.

If the first witch had indeed been behind everything, it made sense for her to leave that kind of power behind. If her enemy were to have just killed herself immediately after their fight, her revenge wouldn't have been complete, after all.

Once a saint became a witch, she was overcome by destructive urges that she couldn't repress. Regardless of her will, the witch *had* to commit atrocities.

And so, when this world—or rather, the fundamental power that moved everything in this world, mana (incredibly cliché name, I know)—sensed that the saint was dead, or that another witch had appeared, it gave birth to a new saint to keep the balance. It was as if the world thought something like, *maybe this time it'll all work out!*

That was why the saint was always born after the witch appeared.

Pretty shitty system, right?

While it had never happened, if someone other than the saint were to hypothetically kill the witch, they'd die too. They wouldn't be able to bear the first witch's powerful grudge. Regardless of how strong they were, their body just wasn't made to handle that curse.

I mean, you just had to look at me—I was pretty much OP, but even I had lost years of my life and stopped aging after absorbing a small amount of dark magic.

If a human were to defeat the witch, though, a new one wouldn't be born to replace her; the cycle would finally be broken.

The only person who could achieve that was our local MC, Verner. However, if you did that in the game, Verner would die and you'd get a bad end.

Most people didn't quite agree that it was considered bad, though, since Verner's death would break the cruel cycle the witch and saint were trapped in, and it allowed Eterna to live a full life. *That's more of a happy ending in my book.*

Anyway, that was the main reason why I hadn't killed the witch already. I was pretty sure I *could* do it, but I'd kick the bucket right after. It was too soon for that.

I hadn't killed enough monsters, and there were some events that'd mess everything up if I wasn't there to help Verner...

Even if I were to unalive the witch and break the cycle now, Verner and

Eterna's happiness could still easily be destroyed by monsters or unfortunate events. If that happened...there wouldn't have been any point in my reincarnation.

I didn't want to give them a happy ending so brittle that it could be ruined immediately after my death. I'd only make my exit once I was entirely sure nothing could threaten their happiness. Ever.

In practical terms, that meant I first had to get rid of every last monster.

Huh? What's that? Monsters have feelings too? They're just trying to live their lives? Some monsters are nice and don't hurt humans? Does it look like I care?

If you were to follow that line of thinking, the farmers who turned their livestock into meat every winter were much worse than I was.

Anyway, I needed to get back to the topic at hand. Once Eterna had killed the witch, she'd obviously noticed the truth. She'd pretended that everything was fine, but she was terrified of turning into the next witch. She'd run away from Verner.

In the end, she'd pretended to have fully become the witch long before it was actually supposed to have happened so Verner would kill her... All the while, she had to watch him fight her with the new waifu he'd chosen, hand in hand.

The worst part was that her last wish—dying at Verner's hand—didn't even end up coming true. In most cases, the girl Verner had chosen would sacrifice herself to kill Eterna and they would die together. Then, Verner would hold his dying waifu's body close, bawl his eyes out, and exchange a few final words with her...while Eterna died alone a little further away.

The last option was Eterna killing herself to avoid dragging Verner to his death with her. Suicide wasn't normally possible for a saint-turned-witch, but Eterna had somehow managed thanks to the power of love or something.

My poor Eterna's suffered way too much!

By the way, the aforementioned ending was only possible in two routes: the sick girl's and Aina Fox's—the two that were always destined to die unless you were on their route. Considering the heroine died most of the time, these two routes were pretty popular since you got to experience a true happy end.

Oh, I ended up rambling about a lot of useless stuff, but none of that told me why Eterna had reacted the way she had.

The witch was still alive, which meant Eterna hadn't turned evil yet.

So why had she reacted like she was the witch?

I really don't get it. Totally clueless. Let me think for a sec... Yeah, no, I've got nothing. All right, let's put that on the back burner for now.

I told Verner to check on Eterna and see if she was okay. I'd just observe the situation for now.

Aina Fox still hadn't made a move either, so that was yet another issue on hold. Maybe she'd never do anything at all, and she'd stay a nice quiet background character?

As for the next event... It differed depending on the heroine you picked, but none of them were dangerous enough to get someone killed. It didn't really matter.

Verner still hadn't seemed to get involved with any girl besides Eterna.

Although it might've sounded a bit mean of me to say, I actually thought that was for the best. As long as they didn't speak to Verner, most of the potential heroines wouldn't play a part in the story, and as a result, wouldn't risk dying.

Before summer vacation started there were mid-term exams, but...I didn't really have to care about that, did I? During summer vacation, Verner'd just go on a date with whichever girl had the highest affection level for him. I could ignore that too.

After that... It'd be time for the first biannual martial tournament. The witch would send monsters to assassinate the saint, so there'd most likely be a battle.

Well, at least we'd have some peace until the tournament started.

No, hang on a minute... I feel like I'm forgetting something important.

There was another event where the monsters that were kept in the academy went crazy. They were bred within the academy to be used for training. Wasn't that pitiful, to be born and raised as moving targets for the knight students?

Anyway, because of the witch's powers, they'd escape and start attacking people during the event. They were weaklings that didn't manage to do much damage, though. If memory serves, they only killed two random students before the teachers and the strongest students stopped them.

By the way, this event was a good opportunity for Verner to show off by killing one of the monsters in front of his prospective waifu. It boosted her affection level a ton in one go.

Regardless, it was a bit sad for the two students, even if they were unnamed extras. There was no reason for me to let them die like that, so I'd save them immediately when the event started.



Ever since Ellize had entered the academy, an effervescent atmosphere had taken the school by storm. Some students squealed whenever she passed them by in the corridors, while others giggled after catching a glance of the renowned saint.

Most of the youngsters that had enrolled in the academy had done so in the hope of one day fighting by the saint's side. To be more specific, the majority of the current generation of wanna-be magic knights only dreamed of one thing: standing alongside not just *any* saint, but Ellize, the greatest saint in history.

"Lady Ellize smiled at me today!"

"How nice. Well, she greeted me today."

"Okay, but hear me out—she *encouraged* me. I feel like I can do anything now!"

While a group of students were chatting among themselves excitedly, Ellize—the very subject of all their gossip—walked by. Layla, Ellize's loyal guard, was so firmly glued to her side that it was impossible for them to approach her, but Ellize seemed to notice the students' worshipful gazes nonetheless. She smiled at them, and their faces flushed red immediately. One of them even swooned.

There was one person, though, who didn't seem to enjoy the current atmosphere. Rather, it seemed she was growing increasingly depressed. That person was Eterna.

She couldn't stop herself from thinking that she might be the witch. No, it wasn't just a possibility anymore—she was *certain* that she was the witch, and it terrified her.

Ellize had enrolled in this academy because she'd sensed the witch's presence. It was only a matter of time before she found out the witch's—Eterna's—identity. What would happen when she did?

Eterna agonized about it all day and all night. She could barely sleep anymore. From time to time, she felt Ellize's eyes linger on her like she was scrutinizing her.

She tried to fight weak monsters, hoping to take her mind off of things by focusing on training, but it didn't help much.

Perhaps if she talked to Ellize and let her know she didn't mean any harm, she'd spare her? Even if she truly was the witch, she'd never done anything wrong. As long as she continued to behave, Ellize would surely forgive her!

She wasn't sure why Farah had ended up that way, but it must've been some sort of mistake. Eterna had never tried to control her or force her to attack Ellize.

Eterna had finally begun to feel a little more settled, when yet another trial was laid before her. She'd been listening to her teacher's lecture when suddenly, screams echoed outside the classroom.

"Save me!"

"Monsters?! In the academy?! How?!"

Before she could react or even understand what was going on, Ellize had sprung into action, jumping to her feet. Layla, her guard, had followed closely behind. Verner had taken a few more seconds to act, but he'd also stood up and dashed to the door.

Beyond the door, a large horde of monsters were attacking some poor students. While they all looked smaller and weaker than the ones Eterna had seen in the basement that day, there were hundreds—no, thousands?—of them all over the school.

There was no way the teachers and students could get rid of all these monsters without any casualties... Or at least, that *would've* been the case if *she* hadn't been here.

"Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst."

Ellize said something Eterna didn't understand, then a magic circle appeared at her feet. It quickly began to expand and soon covered the entire academy, enveloping everyone in soft light.

A few people had been on the verge of being attacked by monsters, but against all expectations, the ones who ended up flying were the monsters themselves.

"It's a defensive spell! It doesn't just cancel damage, but also reflects the enemies' attacks back at them!" Supple Ment, the magic instructor that had been teaching Eterna and the others, screamed at the top of his lungs. "No, not only that—are the reflected attacks even stronger?! I'd say they're twice as— No...three times stronger?! Wait! The monsters who've been repelled are all paralyzed! That means there's thunder magic mixed in with the light spell! To think she covered the whole academy with such an elaborate spell in the blink of an eye!"

He'd immediately understood the gravity of Ellize's spell, which made him somewhat impressive too.

Eterna was astonished by Ellize's incredible display as she looked at the students in the corridor.

"I-It hurts...so much..." a student moaned in pain. It looked like his shoulder had been injured before Ellize had been able to deploy her barrier. Blood gushed out from his wound, and his face was as white as a sheet.

The saint walked up to him and healed him.

"Lady Ellize... Could this be...?" Layla trailed off.

"It's most likely what you are thinking," Ellize stated. "The witch used her miasma to stimulate the monsters and make them attack. I'm sure of it."

Eterna shivered at her words. The witch's miasma? Stimulate the monsters?

She knew exactly how this had happened! She'd been in close contact with monsters while she'd been training recently...

No... All of this... Everything's my fault...

She'd naively assumed that everything would be all right as long as she bore no ill will toward anybody, but it was clear she'd been sorely mistaken. The witch was still the witch, no matter what. It should've been obvious. There were no records of a nice witch—not a single one. Regardless of her will, she'd plunge the world into an era of darkness and suffering. She understood this now.

Just like Ellize's presence was enough to light up a place, just as Ellize was the light itself, Eterna's presence was enough to draw a veil of darkness over her surroundings. She *was* the darkness.

I don't want to hurt people anymore... Yes, I need to disappear from this world before I cause any more suffering...

She got up and left the classroom, staggering like a drunkard. Under normal circumstances, someone would've noticed how oddly she was behaving. Unfortunately, Ellize's miracle had everyone enraptured, and no one saw Eterna walk off.

Ironically, a bright light sometimes blinded people and prevented them from noticing their surroundings even more than pitch-black darkness would.

Chapter 10: Confusion

Ha ha ha! Flatter me more! Flatter the greatest genius of this world! Here, healed! Easy as pie! Oh, wait... Did I mess up?

I was currently having a blast healing people and basking in my accomplishments. I'd done a wonderful job of dealing with the monsters, if I dared say so myself! Thanks to me, the event had come to an end with a total of...zero casualties!

As long as someone wasn't dead, I could heal pretty much anything. *Seriously, I'm such a genius that it even scares me sometimes.*

As Ellize, I realized all over again how much of a monster she was. She was practically a bugged character at this point.

It made sense for her to be strong, since the player was meant to fight her in the second part of the game. I guess the writers had no choice but to make her into a dumbass who wasted her insane talent by playing around instead of training in order for the player to have a shot at beating her.

Not that I was complaining. Thanks to the setting, I got to enjoy being completely OP and I was here for it.

"After rain comes fair weather," I said in English.

Blurting out random sentences in English makes me sound so cool, for real! Everything ends up sounding like a killer move name! Guess it's time for my third super technique!

I activated my spell, and a rain of fine light particles showered down on all the injured students left in one go. If I went around treating them one by one, it'd take hours.

All right, BAM! Everyone's healed! Doooone!

"But Ellize, will your spell even heal people inside buildings?" you ask? Fear not! Although my magic rained down, it wasn't really water, so it could easily

pass through roofs and ceilings.

If there *was* a flaw to my spell, it'd be that it affected literally *everyone* inside the casting area. If someone was hurt, it'd heal their wounds, but if they were already doing fine... Well, they'd have some extra energy for the day. They'd probably feel a little hyper until tomorrow, but oh well. Couldn't really help it.

Aight, Four-Eyed Pervert, I'm done. There shouldn't be anyone else who's hurt, but meh, I'm too lazy to check. You can do it, right? You guys—teachers—should try to actually be useful every once in a while, got it?

"Of course, saint! Please leave it to me! If I may... What you've accomplished here today is nothing short of a miracle..."

Sorry to disappoint, bro, but miracles aren't a thing. I'm just way too OP compared to these weak-ass monsters.

There was no reason to burst his bubble, though, so I kept that thought to myself.

Now that I was done dealing with this mess, it was time to go back to the classroom and resume my favorite activity: admiring my darling Eterna.

I wondered if Eterna had sensed the underlying creepiness of my stares—she was starting to become a little sensitive.

Ah, I knew I was looking at her butt too often...

I mean, I got it. It was kinda gross, after all. I was actually starting to understand it all too well, in fact, as I was also on the receiving end of a creepy dude's gaze—damn that Four-eyed Pervert!

I decided I'd apologize for staring so much later on, and— Wait. Where was Eterna? She'd vanished from the classroom for some reason.

Had she gotten so tired of being ogled that she left?

Hey, Ver! Kiddo, d'ya have any idea where your future wife is?

"Eterna? Now that you mention it... She left, didn't she?"

NERVER?! Are you for real?!

No, wait, his name was Verner. Whatever! SAME THING!!!

How the hell did you not notice that your waifu wasn't here?! It's the main route, it can't be that hard to stay focused on it, now, can it?!

"Now that you mention it"? "Now that you mention it"? Do you want me to punch you in the face? You're not even trying to woo another heroine, so what the heck are you doing?!

"L-Lady Ellize! If you're looking for Eterna, I saw her walk out of the classroom."

Finally, an eyewitness! Good job!

I remembered this girl—Fiora. She was pretty cute with her shoulder-length blond hair, so it helped. She was the one I'd healed some time ago. The one with the scar on her face who couldn't walk... Oh, and who'd been kidnapped by Farah along with Eterna and Verner.

"I also saw her leave. She looked down and went that way," a male student said, pointing in a direction.

And you are...? I just can't remember dudes. I can't.

I probably should've asked him who he was, but I decided to thank him with a smile instead. *Whoever you are, thanks, I guess.*

"Are you sure, John?" Verner asked.

So that's what he's called.

"Yeah... She looked like she was brooding over something," he answered.

It looked like he and Verner were pretty close. Now that I thought about it... I had a feeling he might've been one of the hostages that time...or maybe not? *No clue.* Maybe that was how they'd become close, though. Getting kidnapped together had to count for something.

"Let's go after her! I'm a bit worried," Fiora blurted out before leaving the room with Verner and the random dude in tow.

I should probably follow them... I know how it goes! We're going to Egypt, right?! I'm so in.

"Lady Ellize, if you're thinking of following them, let me come too."

Oh, there you are, Layla!

How reliable. Layla was a very capable person, so having her tag along was reassuring.

“If our saint is going somewhere, my duty is to follow... My dear students, please study by yourselves for the time being.”

Oh no. I swear to God, I don't need you, you four-eyed bastard.

Talk about a messy party... It made sense for Verner, the main character, and Layla, one of the dateable heroines, to tag along, but what was with the rest of them?! Fiora didn't even *appear* in the game, no one cared about some random dude, and we even had a low-tier villain following us around.

Then, of course, there was the cherry on top—me, the trashy fake.

You couldn't have found a better cast for a comedy.

Anyway, our ridiculous group went after Eterna, but as you might've expected, we were too late. We couldn't find her anywhere.

“She should be this way. It's very faint but I can feel her mana,” the damn Four-Eyed Pervert said, sounding for all the world like a self-confident ass.

Wait, could he be...much more talented than I expected? Right! Being a stalker must mean he's good at this sort of stuff! You're doing great for once!

While I was incredibly skilled at making everything explode with magic spells, I'd never even tried to track someone's mana. Hey, even the worst of lowlifes had to have good points, right?

We followed Four-eyed Pervert around and eventually made our way to the cliff located right outside the academy. Violent waves were crashing against the rocks.

Seriously, who thought it was a good idea to build a school here of all places?

Okay, I was being a little mean. The academy hadn't actually been built *on* a cliff—it had been erected on high ground, and the cliff just happened to be a little further down.

Anyway, that wasn't important. What really mattered was the fact that my

little Eterna had gone over the fence and was standing at the edge of the cliff. One more step and she'd fall.

What the hell are you doing, sweetie?!

Verner, seeing Eterna in such a dangerous spot, freaked out. "Eterna! What are you doing there?!"

No, but for real, what's going on?

"Don't come near me!" Eterna yelled back, taking another step further. One of her feet was almost off the cliff now.

Uh oh. If she steps back again, she'll really fall.

She wouldn't die even if she did, but still. First, I had to get her to calm down and ask her why she was doing this.

"I... I must disappear!" she exclaimed.

"What are you talking about?!" Verner shot back.

While listening to the two lovers quarrel, I tried to make sense of what she'd just said. What made her act this way in the game?

I was proud to say I'd finished every single route and read every guide there was. Despite that, I still couldn't remember an event where Eterna threatened to jump off a cliff. Then again, small events were hidden everywhere, and people were still discovering them years after the game first came out. While there were strategy guides, it was hard to be sure they were exhaustive.

So how did this happen? Had she grown tired of waiting for Verner because he was too focused on his damn muscles?!

"Everything... Everything's my fault! It's my fault Miss Farah became weird... And it's also because of me that the monsters attacked everyone!"

Huh? What're you saying, girl? How are these incidents your fault? I don't follow.

I failed to understand why Eterna had suddenly gotten that idea. I'd told them very clearly that Farah had been controlled by the witch, and today's incident was also the witch's fault. Eterna didn't have anything to do with any of it.

Anyhow, first I had to get her to calm down. I could see how on edge she was.

“Please calm down. I can see your heart is unsettled. Come back to us, then we can—” I tried to reason with her, but she cut me off.

“I told you not to come near me!” she screamed.

I didn’t get why, but she was getting even more agitated. Was she reacting like that because of me? Did she really think I was gross?! Aaargh, I shouldn’t have stared at her butt! I really shouldn’t have!

“You don’t need to lie to me anymore, Lady Ellize... I-I know everything...” she continued.

What?! Uh oh... Did she figure out I was a fake?! Did she figure out I was a piece of shit all along?!

I shouldn’t be too surprised—she *was* the saint, after all. She was bound to notice that she couldn’t get hurt and figure out that she was the real deal. Unless it was really that butt thing...

It’s not what you think, Eterna! I-I was just being possessed by some evil spirit, I promise! It forced me to think of how thick and juicy your ass is. I’m sorryyyyyyyy!!!

No, wait... If it was really about that, why would she try to commit suicide? Did she plan to show to everyone that she couldn’t get hurt even by jumping off a cliff to prove that she was the saint?

How foolish of you, Eterna. That idea...would totally work, damn it!

I tried to speak up again. “I’m not sure I understand what you’re trying to say. Could you please come this way first and—”

“I knew you wouldn’t understand... There’s no way someone like you could understand my feelings...”

If you put it that way...

It was true, I probably couldn’t understand. I’d spent my time pretending to be the saint and stealing her rightful spot. She was a victim, and I was the one responsible for her suffering. It wasn’t really *my* fault that Ellize and Eterna had been switched at birth, though. If anything, the true culprit was that hack of a

prophet who messed up when predicting which baby was to become the saint.

So don't hate me! It's not my fault!

Or so I thought, until Eterna dropped a bomb on me.

"How could the saint understand the feelings of the witch?!"

I see, I see. You're the witch... That comes as a surprise. But you know, being a fake saint isn't a walk in the park either—

Wait...

What the heck had she just said? The witch? Not the saint? Did she really say "witch"?!

Uh...

Sorry, but...WHAT?!

Even I was left speechless by Eterna's sudden declaration. I felt like a racer who'd just passed a long, straight tunnel, only to be sent flying off course unexpectedly by a random passerby.

N/A NOT FOUND. N/A NOT FOUND. N/A NOT FOUND.

First of all, the saint and the witch could NOT be the same age. A new saint was always born *after* the previous saint had died or *after* she had turned into a witch. For us to be the same age, the previous saint would've needed to kill the witch as a literal baby! Then, she would've had to turn into the witch instantly so another saint could be born.

Even if Eterna had no way of knowing all that, she should've at least learned that the saint was always born after the witch appeared in school—it was written in every textbook.

Speaking of these textbooks, the students weren't expected to buy them when they enrolled. They were passed down to the newer students by their upperclassmen every school year, so they were pretty old and dirty.

Anyway, this generation's witch had started doing horrible things and growing her army of monsters right after I'd been reincarnated into this world—or in other words, back when Eterna and I were basically toddlers.

Eterna had grown up in a small isolated village, but she must've at least heard of how scary the witch was, hadn't she? If she knew the witch was already terrorizing people when she was a child, why would she ever think that there was another one, let alone assume that it was *her*?

Even if she'd somehow gotten that idea, declaring it publicly like she'd just done was insane! Regardless of whether it was the truth or not, the witch was the common enemy of every human in this world—including the saint. Now that she'd said that, she risked getting killed for it.



“The witch?! Lady Ellize! Step back!”

“Eterna, this is a very serious declaration you just made... While it’s completely impossible for you to be the witch, you can’t just joke about such things.”

Hey! Layla! Four-Eyed Pervert! Stop trying to fight her!

I jumped in front of the two of them and stopped them with my hand while keeping my eyes on Eterna. She looked frightened.

How did we end up like this...?

“Wait, Eterna! You can’t be the witch!” Fiora yelled.

“He’s right! Don’t you remember?! Miss Farah kidnapped you too last time! You almost died!” the random guy added.

They were completely right. If anyone stopped to think for a minute, it was clear that there was no way she was the witch.

However, the next moment, Eterna took out a knife and grasped the blade tightly. No matter how many times she tried, she couldn’t draw any blood.

Everyone froze.

“I’ve never gotten hurt,” Eterna explained with a detached tone.

Argh, this is starting to become messy.

All of a sudden, Eterna was a much more credible witch in everyone’s eyes. Naturally, she wasn’t, but she’d managed to sow the seed of doubt.

When I’d last explained how witches and saints could get hurt, I’d said that they could hurt themselves. However, they could only do so in specific ways. The saint could hurt herself because the power of the saint worked on her. Putting it the other way around, it meant that as long as she didn’t use her powers, she’d remain unharmed.

For instance, if Eterna had decided to wield the knife as a weapon and tried to cut open her hand, she would’ve succeeded because her powers would’ve gone through the knife she was holding. The blade itself wouldn’t harm her, so just gripping the sharp edge wouldn’t do anything. For the same reason, jumping off

the cliff wouldn't do anything to her, nor would trying to hang herself.

"Sir... Only the witch or the saint can hold a knife like this without getting hurt, right?" she asked Supple Ment.

"That's...right," he confirmed.

"We all know that there's already a saint. There's no way Lady Ellize could be the witch, so...it must mean that I am! That's the only way this can all make sense..."

Ah. I finally found the answer I was looking for.

Now I understood how she'd reached that conclusion.

Instead of noticing that she had the powers of the saint and jumping to the assumption that I had to be a fake, she'd deduced that she was the witch. In her mind, I couldn't *not* be the saint.

Now that I'd finally figured it out, I understood where she was coming from. It made me realize all over again how different our ways of thinking were. Like, if I had been in her shoes, my first reflex would've been to doubt Ellize. That was just how I was. I had a hard time trusting people, and I was naturally suspicious of any new person I met.

Eterna was the reverse. She trusted people and wouldn't doubt them unless she had ironclad reasons. That was how she'd ended up like this. In a nutshell, Eterna was such a good girl that it had led to the giant misunderstanding.

Anyway, it wasn't the time to marvel over how wonderful she was. I needed to focus, otherwise she'd be branded as the witch.

The cliff situation wasn't really that pressing. What mattered was making sure that people didn't actually believe she was the witch. If that happened, everyone would start going after her.

Fortunately, there was a fairly straightforward solution to that problem—I could just come out as the fake.

Now, although it *was* straightforward, there were two issues with the idea. First, I'd be sentenced to death for impersonating the saint. Second, if I, the fake, disappeared, the witch would definitely try to kill Eterna—and she

certainly had a shot considering Eterna's current level.

All in all, I kind of wanted to avoid being outed as the fake right now. Then again...if I didn't say anything, Eterna, the real saint, would be treated as the witch.

Should I come out and say it? Fuck... What should I do?

If I blew my cover now, all my careful planning would've been for naught.

I didn't want to accept the death penalty for the time being, so I'd have to go on the run. The difficulty would spike from easy to lunatic in a split second. But letting Eterna be branded as the witch didn't sit right with me...

Guess I don't have a choice.

"Eterna, you're mistaken. The saint is—"

"No! Don't come near me, I said!" she screamed again.

Right as I was about to spill the beans, Eterna tried to take another step back. This time, she fell right off the cliff.

SERIOUSLY?!

Eterna let out a surprised yelp as she started falling. "Ah," she blurted out, an idiotic expression plastered on her face.

Damn!

Her fall had been so sudden that I hadn't reacted fast enough. I activated my flying spell as quickly as I possibly could and flew toward Eterna.

For some reason, Verner jumped right after me—yet another unforeseen event.

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!

He'd most likely jumped on instinct to save the heroine.

I get how you feel Verner, I really do! But you can't fly! What the hell are you hoping to do?!

I grabbed Verner's arm in a hurry, but he dragged me down with him. How was that idiot so heavy?! How much did he even weigh? Argh! It had to be

because of all his stupid training! I hadn't had enough time to stabilize my spell, and I think I hadn't used enough mana to strengthen myself.

Long story short, I ended up falling too.

We were rushing toward a dangerously sharp rock that stuck out. If we hit it at full speed, Verner would definitely get badly hurt. Even his dark powers wouldn't protect him from something like that. He wasn't the witch, after all; he'd only gotten a little portion of her powers by mistake.

AAAH! We're gonna crash! Wasted!

I barely managed to get us to dodge the rock, but the sudden turn threw off my balance, and we fell into the water.

Ew. Salty.



His body had moved before he even realized it.

Ever since Eterna had screamed that she was the witch, Verner's brain hadn't quite managed to follow. No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't make sense of it. It was completely impossible for her to be the witch, and he couldn't see the situation as anything other than Eterna having a temporary bout of madness.

Still, he realized that what she was saying put her in a dangerous situation. He wanted her to calm down and sit so they could have a proper talk about all of this.

Sadly, Eterna hadn't given them enough time to convince her of her foolishness. She'd ended up falling over the cliff...with Ellize following right behind her.

Verner couldn't quite remember what happened next. Before he knew it, he was rushing toward the crags too. His body had most likely made the decision for him before any conscious process. Had he *thought* about it before jumping, he would've realized how utterly pointless it was. Ellize could fly; she didn't need him. On top of that, she was the saint. Even without her ability to fly, she wouldn't have gotten hurt at all.

Verner's heroic leap was basically nothing more than a suicide attempt, yet another nuisance for Ellize.

Aah... I'm such an idiot...

That was Verner's last thought before he blacked out.

The next time he opened his eyes, he was lying down in some cavern he'd never seen before. He looked to his side and saw Eterna's face. She was out cold.

That was when he noticed a light illuminating the cavern, floating around and emitting enough light and heat for them to feel comfortable. It was like a portable bonfire.

"Are you up?"

As soon as he heard the voice and saw Ellize's gentle smile, Verner jumped to his feet. He had gotten up so fast that even he was surprised.

He finally put two and two together and understood that even though he had inconvenienced her once again, Ellize had saved him.

He was pathetic... He wanted nothing more than to protect her, but he'd been the one who needed saving. *Again*. For the third time.

His debt toward her kept on growing.

"I must say, you scared me. I didn't expect you would jump so suddenly," Ellize said.

"I-I'm sorry... My body moved on its own..."

"I know that you did it to help your precious friend. I wish I could praise you for your bravery, but what you did wasn't brave—it was reckless."

"You're right..."

"Still," Ellize added after a long pause. "The fact that you were able to jump down immediately to save your friend shows how noble your heart is. That's very commendable of you. Still, please cherish yourself just as much as you cherish your friends."

The first word that popped up in Verner's mind was "no!" He wanted to deny

it. He hadn't jumped for Eterna. She *was* a dear friend to him—irreplaceable, even. She was almost like family to him.

He had once lost everyone he'd held dear because of the power that dwelled inside him, and the people of her village had been kind enough to welcome him with open arms nonetheless. Even among the people of that village, Eterna had always been the closest to him.

He loved her a lot and wanted to protect her, that much was true. However, when Eterna had fallen, he hadn't been able to react immediately.

It wasn't that he didn't care about her. He'd just been level-headed enough to make a logical decision: Eterna had demonstrated that she couldn't get hurt, so falling off that cliff likely wouldn't have killed her. On the other hand, if he were to follow her, he'd lose his life for no reason. It made more sense for him to go down the cliff with everyone to look for Eterna. That was the correct answer.

And yet...when Ellize had jumped, he hadn't been able to follow the same thought process. Before he knew it, he'd already jumped, even though Ellize needed him even *less* than Eterna did.

I get it now... I finally understand my feelings for her...

Verner stopped himself from putting his feelings into words and lightly tapped his closed fist against his heart. It wasn't the time or place to say it. A confession from an immature man like him would only be a nuisance to Ellize. He decided to conceal his feelings for the time being and focus on what was important right now.

"Lady Ellize, I've been thinking about it... Could Eterna have the same issue as me?" he asked.

"The same issue as you... You're right! That's a possibility!"

"Yes. I... I can't say I've never gotten hurt, but I definitely don't get hurt as often as others do. After my family threw me out and I was banished from my village, there were many instances where I should've died many times, but didn't. That power kept me alive... Even when I didn't have anything to eat or drink, I couldn't die."

The saint and the witch couldn't get hurt by anyone else but themselves or

the other. Everyone believed that this applied only to the two of them, but there was an exception—Verner.

He was neither the saint nor the witch. That much was obvious, given that he was a man. And yet, he held a power that was very similar to that of the witch.

That was how Verner had concluded that Eterna was most likely just like him.

When he told Ellize, she had looked like a god-given realization had suddenly hit her.

“That works... It’s certainly a good explanation,” she continued. “Eterna isn’t the witch, she just happens to have similar powers.”

Verner shared his worries with her. “Lady Ellize... I can’t help but wonder if Eterna is having trouble controlling her powers... Just like I did in the past...”

Ellize nodded pensively.

Before Verner had met Ellize, he had also been unable to control his powers. He’d wandered around without daring to settle anywhere for fear of hurting people again. What if Eterna was also like that?

Ellize shot a glance at Eterna before shaking her head.

“No, that isn’t the case. I can’t see any trace of her powers having gone on a rampage. She hasn’t hurt anyone. She was just unlucky... The coincidences piled up, and she convinced herself that she was at fault.”

“I-I see... That’s a relief,” Verner said with a sigh.

Ellize smiled at him in return, but Verner immediately averted his eyes. He could feel how hot his face was, and he was certain his cheeks were bright red to match. Hopefully, the dim light would help him hide it.

“Let’s go back. Everyone must be worried. We can tell Eterna what really happened to her when she wakes up,” Ellize said.

“Yes.”

That was when Verner noticed something strange—Ellize’s sleeve had been torn off, and under the shredded fabric...was a cut.

“Lady Ellize? Your arm...”

“My arm? What’s wrong with my arm?”

“Hmm... You... You got hurt.”

Ellize reached with her other hand to touch the cut, a puzzled expression on her face.

When she removed her hand, her skin was as perfectly smooth and unblemished as always, and a red piece of thread dangled between her fingers.

“Looks like a piece of thread was stuck to my arm. It must have come off my uniform when I fell,” she said with a light tone.

“A piece of...thread...”

What an embarrassing mistake, Verner thought.

Ellize couldn’t get hurt, so he’d freaked out over nothing. If he’d taken a second to think about it and gotten a better look, he would’ve noticed it was just some thread immediately, he concluded.

Had Verner truly been able to think things through, though, what he would’ve noticed was that Ellize’s story didn’t hold up. Verner wore the academy’s male uniform, which was black and blue. Eterna wore the same uniform, which for girls, was white and green. Ellize...wore the exact same clothes as Eterna did.

That meant none of them had any red fabric on them, so how could a piece of red thread find its way on her arm?

However, for the time being, Verner remained blissfully ignorant of the obvious discrepancy in Ellize’s story.

Chapter 11: Layla Is a Worrywart

Fuck, Verner saw my cut!

I'd most likely gotten hurt while falling since I'd been more focused on holding on to Verner and keeping him out of harm's way. I'd let my guard down and Verner had noticed it.

This stuff happens once in a while, right? You get a minor injury, but don't notice it until much later because it didn't hurt on the spot...

Well, that was exactly what had happened to me. Until Verner had pointed out the cut on my arm, I had no clue it was there.

Thankfully, he was the only one there. I wouldn't have managed to bamboozle a whole group, but one person was still doable. I was a master manipulator, after all.

I'd immediately healed my cut, conjured a small piece of thread—or at least something that looked like it—with my magic, and played dumb. I'd pretended I wasn't hurt at all, and Verner had bought it, hook, line, and sinker.

By the way, I'd used light magic to create that fake thread. After all, colors were just light reflected in a certain way...or something like that. I had a feeling I'd heard something like that in the past.

Anyway, the point is I'd noticed a while ago that—thanks to light magic—I could color anything the way I liked. So what I'd *really* done was create a small thread of red light. With the proper shading around it, it looked just like the real thing. Well, it was good enough to fool Verner, at least.

I needed to be a good schemer to play the role of the saint, so I was used to pulling stunts like this. People were eager to believe whatever they saw—or thought they saw—which meant that as long as I could use colors at will, I could easily create “miracles” for them to worship. I could single-handedly craft rainbows and auroras, so whenever I wanted to pretend the heavens were on my side, I could produce a fancy little light show in the sky.

What's that? My miracles were bogus? I was pretty sure most—if not all—miracles were just as fake!

Anyway, with that whole mess out of the way, Eterna—who had been completely out of control at the time—was now as tame as a puppy. She knelt on the floor, trembling and apologizing, her face flushed a bright red.

“How could the saint understand the feelings of the witch?!”

“HA HA HA!!!”

Fiora was imitating Eterna, while what's-his-face laughed his ass off.

As for Eterna, her face gradually grew more and more scarlet. Her shoulders shook ever so slightly, and I couldn't tell if she was about to cry or laugh. Either way, it seemed like she wanted nothing more than to crawl into a hole and die.

You reap what you sow, sweetheart. Also, I'm having the best time of my life looking at your embarrassed expression, hye he he. Who needs food when you can just look at Eterna's flushed face all day instead? We're eating good.

Eterna had completely misread the situation. At least, that's what Verner and I told the others when we went back. He also mimicked what Eterna had done with the knife to show everyone she wasn't the only exception. Naturally, that didn't make anyone think he was the witch. He was a man, so there was no risk.

After listening to our explanation, Eterna finally calmed down. She was deeply ashamed of her behavior, though, hence why she was currently apologizing profusely and red as a tomato.

“Still, how intriguing... To think another power that's so similar, yet different to that of the witch or the saint exists. What in the world could it be...?” Four-eyed Pervert pondered, staring at Verner.

I understood his interest. After all, Verner's existence meant that maybe—just maybe—people other than the saint had a shot at defeating the witch. The discovery of a whole new power would be huge.

Sadly for him, Verner's powers weren't new or different. The source of his magic was nothing more than a part of the witch's soul.

While the current saint-turned-witch was still fighting against the old witch's

powers, she cut off a small part of her soul. It had wandered around before attaching itself to another soul—one that had yet to be born. That was how Verner, a baby boy, had ended up with dark magic.

Just like the first witch's curse, which possessed the saints out of revenge, the current witch had managed to leave something of herself behind before she'd been completely swallowed by the curse.

In the game, you only learned of this during the witch's route. In every other route, you only got a ton of foreshadowing without actually understanding *why* or *how* Verner had ended up with such powers.

Either way, I couldn't just blurt that out right now—Verner would be in danger if I did. I figured pretending that he had some strange power that's somehow similar to the witch's was good enough for the time being.

Honestly, I was just glad to finally see this mess end. I had to admit, I'd freaked out when Eterna had blurted out that she was the witch in front of everyone.

Thanks to Verner, it hadn't turned into anything serious, though. If he hadn't asked me whether Eterna's power and his were similar, I probably wouldn't have thought of a good excuse by myself.

Eterna was prostrating herself in front of me and apologizing. "Lady Ellize... I-I'm really sorry for causing so much trouble for you because of a stupid misunderstanding..."

I assured her it was fine. Now that I understood her train of thought, I could see I'd been slightly at fault too.

That said, you have to take good care of yourself from now on, okay?! Anyway...case closed! We'll get to enjoy some peace now. Good, good, time to go eat a nice bath, then. Wait... I meant "time to eat some good food and enjoy a nice bath, then."



A few days had passed since the uproar caused by Eterna's event, and peaceful days pervaded once more.

In the midst of this tranquility, only one person remained constantly on edge: Layla Scott, the saint's guard. Layla's life mission was to ensure Ellize's safety at all times. Now that they were in the academy, she couldn't afford to lose focus.

The academy was safer than most places because the place was filled with knights-to-be, ready to jump at a moment's notice to protect the saint. That much was true.

However, Layla wasn't only worried about Ellize's physical safety. What *really* set her nerves on edge and kept her constantly worried were the lascivious gazes some of the students threw at Ellize.

While they weren't full-fledged knights yet, they were meant to serve and protect the saint. Ogling and lusting over her were irredeemable sins. Admiring her was acceptable in Layla's book, but regarding her *like that* just wasn't!

And yet... Layla couldn't help but wonder if it was possible for anyone—anyone at all—to not feel any attraction or lust for Ellize.

Impossible, she concluded.

Regardless of their gender, no one could resist Ellize's charms. Anyone who wasn't immediately smitten with her had to be blind or utterly tasteless, unable to appreciate beauty.

Layla had woven herself an absurd and difficult reality, caught between constant vigilance of those who lusted over Ellize, while regarding those who didn't as oddballs.

To be fair, she wasn't wrong. Plenty of students—including Verner—had entered the academy with the sole aim of approaching Ellize. It was also perfectly natural for healthy, growing boys to ponder over the possibilities of getting close to the saint in a certain way...

Naturally, prospective knights weren't stupid enough to even think of putting their hands on Ellize unless she asked for it. As far as Layla was concerned, though, their lustful glances were already sinful enough. They couldn't be forgiven.

To her dismay, Ellize was surprisingly unguarded.

While there was a separate bath reserved for important guests that she could use, she insisted on going to the students' communal bath at least once a week.

She had her reasons, of course. She'd told Layla she wanted to understand the students who were doing their best for her. She was eager for a chance to get to know them better and hoped to forge strong ties with them.

Ellize's intentions were certainly laudable, but it was still preposterous! She couldn't let her guard down just because she was in the company of women only. She was walking into the lion's den! She was so charming that not even girls were safe from her spell! Layla would know—she was one of them.

In fact, Layla's worries had been proven right. Ellize always visited the bathhouse at the same time every week and, unsurprisingly, it *just so happened* to be *packed* every single time. There were always more than twice as many girls there compared to other days.

While Layla had a lot on her plate to worry about, there was one person she was especially wary of, someone who seemed to harbor *particularly* perverted thoughts toward Ellize—Supple Ment.

Although he was a teacher, that didn't seem to stop him from gawking at Ellize in the most disgusting of ways. She was certain he'd eventually try to pull something strange.

Layla knew she was the only one who could protect her lovely master from that freak.

That's right! I have to protect Lady Ellize with everything I have!

Sure enough, something finally happened.

Ellize had decided to head to the school's cafeteria to eat with the students. It was one of her attempts to further her understanding and bond with them.

After she'd finished her meal, she handed her plate and tableware to the staff member in charge of collecting and cleaning them, then walked away.

It was at that moment that the disgusting Supple Ment started showing his eccentricity. He crouched and dashed through the entire cafeteria, skittering

around like a cockroach, looking for the opportune moment the kitchen staff took their eyes off the dishes. When that happened, he hurriedly grabbed Ellize's used spoon and carefully snuck it into a handmade leather pouch.

Supple Ment had only needed a moment to accomplish his crime. No one but Layla, the head of Ellize's guard, had noticed.

What is this disgusting four-eyed pervert doing?!

Layla was enraged. She resolved to do whatever she must to rid the land of that evil and ruthless pervert.

"Lady Ellize, I'm sorry for asking you this out of the blue, but would you mind going back without me? There is something I must take care of here."

"Something you must take care of? I don't mind waiting for you, then."

"No, please don't concern yourself with such trivial matters! I can deal with this on my own."

Layla made Ellize return to her room before stepping back into the cafeteria.

While she felt bad about leaving her master's side, she knew she had to take care of this scourge first.

"Mr. Supple Ment..." she approached him, reaching out for her sword as she spoke. "Why don't you tell me what you're planning to do with that thing you just stole?"

Her murderous intent was oozing out with every word. She was out for blood, and it was clear she was ready to slay him depending on his answer.

Most prospective knights—no, most knights *period*—would've trembled in front of Layla's overwhelming aura, but Supple Ment didn't even blink.

"What a foolish question. I'm obviously going to put it away for safekeeping. A spoon used by our glorious saint is no mere spoon—it's a holy relic. Allowing it to be washed is preposterous, wouldn't you agree?"

Who the hell would agree with you? Verner, who was sitting close by, fiercely retorted...in his head.

It didn't matter what kind of justification Supple Ment tried to come up with;

only a pervert would ever think of stealing a girl's spoon.

"Fair point... But that doesn't mean such a precious relic should end up in the hands of a freak like you!"

Fair point?! Verner couldn't believe his ears. Had Layla *really* just said that?! Was she just as insane as that crazy teacher?

"It's regrettable that you'd think of me that way. I'm positive that no one in this academy could ever protect and preserve this treasure better than I," Supple Ment said, his voice brimming with confidence.

"Don't make me laugh! I know you're only pretending to have good intentions. Who knows what you'll do with it? For all I know, you could lick it, [REDACTED] it, or even [Due to Layla's overactive imagination, we cannot disclose what she said for the safety of our audience. Please forgive us for the inconvenience.] with it!"

Supple looked exasperated, then sneered at her. "You're completely mistaken... But that does get me wondering. Do you ever think of doing such things with the saint's belongings? What a vulgar imagination you have."

Layla reached her breaking point.

"I'm going to kill you!" she screamed.

She was so enraged that her mana burst out violently, making her hair stand. A red aura covered her body.

On the other hand, Supple looked as calm as ever, the ever-present smirk still on his face. He slowly raised his hands in a way that, had Ellize been in the room, would've reminded her of an orchestra conductor. (Enjoying music and going to concerts wasn't really a thing in their world, however, so the comparison didn't occur to anyone there.)

The standstill only lasted for a second. The next moment, Supple's head was lodged in the ceiling, leaving everyone to wonder why he'd looked so in control of the situation. That was just the kind of person he was. He was not all that well-versed in battle, so there was no way in the world he could have defeated Layla, the cream of the crop.

SWOOSH!

Layla twirled her sword in the air, then returned it to its scabbard. She'd been so swift that no one had even seen her unsheathe it in the first place.

"Rest assured. I held myself back."

She *had* been on the verge of killing him, but she'd managed to stop herself. Instead of slicing him up, she'd opted to hit him with the flat of her sword; he was barely hurt.

She picked up the spoon that had tumbled out of Supple's leather pouch and went to return it to the kitchen staff. As she walked, though, a single thought kept creeping into her mind even as she tried to chase it away.

Should I really return this spoon...?

In her hand was a piece of cutlery that had been used by Ellize—the greatest saint in history. There were thousands of people who would die to get their hands on something her master had put into her mouth.

She knew for a fact that not even other women could be trusted.

Even if—for some crazy reason—they didn't lust after her, they were likely to want to bask in the saint's divine protection. She was sure some villages would gladly treat this spoon as a holy relic and enshrine it to be worshiped.

Now that she'd realized this, Layla wasn't sure giving the spoon to one of the kitchen workers was such a good idea. The old ladies from the cafeteria looked like good-natured people, but who knew what kind of ungodly thoughts they were hiding behind their warm smiles?

Actually...wasn't it obvious what they were thinking about? Ellize's existence was a miracle in its own right. No one could stand in front of her and remain unmoved. Layla was certain of that.

(As it turned out, the poor ladies from the cafeteria didn't think much of Ellize's spoon, nor did they have any weird thoughts about her at all, for that matter. They simply respected the saint, and they were grateful she was bringing peace to this world.)

But Layla had no way of knowing that. Now that she'd seen firsthand how

gross Supple could be, everyone looked like an enemy in her eyes. She was an honest and pure girl at heart, but stubborn to a fault. Whenever she was convinced of something, she wouldn't budge or change her mind.

That was why, instead of handing the spoon to anyone, she slipped it into her pocket. (*Scotterbrain!!!*) Now, no one could do anything inappropriate with that spoon.

Layla nodded, a satisfied look on her face. "Good. I took care of everything."

She started walking away, leaving everyone around her to wonder what exactly had been "taken care of."

"What do you mean 'good'?! Are you insane?!" Verner exclaimed, jumping to his feet. He simply couldn't watch silently anymore.

Layla turned to face him and cocked her head inquiringly. She didn't seem to understand why she was suddenly getting yelled at, even though she'd done the right thing.

"Why are you looking at me like you have no clue what I mean?! Don't you realize you're doing the same thing as Mr. Supple?"

"Wh-What?!"

Layla looked utterly shocked. Verner wasn't sure how it was possible, but she truly hadn't noticed she was acting just like the Four-Eyed Pervert.

She pointed at Supple and shouted, "How could you say I'm like him?! I could never resemble that pervert in any way!"

Supple, who was still stuck in the ceiling, started flapping his legs at Layla and Verner's accusations. Contrary to all expectations, he was quite tenacious.

"I'm just being responsible! I'm putting this spoon away for safekeeping so that no one can do anything creepy with it! I'm not like that pervert who wanted to put it away for who-knows-what!"

"Miss Layla... Did you hear yourself just now?!"

Layla might be a hopeless case, Verner thought.

She was so focused on making sure that the spoon didn't end up in a pervert's

possession that she couldn't see the forest for the trees. If he didn't act, though, Ellize might see the spoon and mistakenly think that Layla had been the one to steal it in the first place. She'd definitely feel hurt and betrayed...

There was no way that could happen! Verner didn't want her to be sad.

He made up his mind—he'd get the situation under control no matter what. Layla was acting like a complete lunatic. He needed to get the spoon back from her clutch and hand it over to the kitchen staff. With that, he approached her and blocked her path.

"Miss Layla... Please hand the spoon over. I realize you can't think straight at the moment, but I can't let you walk away with it."

"I can't believe this! Are you also after her spoon?! You're just like that pervert!"

"Why would you even assume that?!"

Layla wasn't about to listen to anyone.

Truth be told, Verner's choice of words had most likely played a big part in Layla's reaction. Instead of bringing an end to the mess, he'd actually added fuel to the fire, and the situation had grown even more chaotic.

Supple, who had remained firmly wedged in the ceiling up until now, finally managed to extricate himself from his predicament. He spun in the air, then gracefully landed on the floor.

"My, my, I can't let this slide, Verner," he stated. "A holy relic should be protected by someone qualified—someone like me."

Damn, you should've stayed stuck in the ceiling... You're gonna make the whole situation worse, Verner lamented. And why the hell are you even calling it a holy relic? It's a spoon. It's literally just a SPOON.

Supple, Layla, and Verner were now engaged in a Mexican standoff, glaring at each other. The rest of the students held their breath, watching their fight intently.

Supple was deep in thought. It was crucial that the holy relic—the spoon—remained fresh. Quite some time had already passed since Ellize had used it,

and it would gradually lose all of her warmth. He needed to get it back before it further deteriorated, use magic to freeze it in time, and enshrine it. It was his mission as someone who had devoted his life to his love for the saint.

Layla was also deep in thought. She was the head of Ellize's guard. She needed to protect her and her honor. Thus, she couldn't give this spoon to anyone else. She simply couldn't allow the saint to become the target of anyone's base instincts. She resolved to protect the spoon to the bitter end. It was her mission as someone who had devoted her life and her loyalty to the saint.

Last, but certainly not least, Verner was also deep in thought. *What the hell am I even doing?* He was probably the only person who realized what this situation looked like from the outside. Three perverts were fighting over a spoon the saint had used, and...he was one of them.

He just wanted to cry, go home, then cry some more.

"Whichever one of you is ready to draw his last breath can come at me," Layla said in a low voice, conjuring flames around her blade.

She had trained harder than any other knight, making her an accomplished magic sword user.

"A magic sword, huh? Ridiculous. Such a pathetic technique could never stop my overwhelming love for the saint!" Supple exclaimed, moving his hands like a conductor once again.

The floor began to rise next to him. In the next moment, it erupted with countless swords. They hovered around Supple, ready to fly at his enemies at his order.

(Needless to say, the school later took out the repair fee from Supple's pay.)

Verner started blushing. He couldn't bring himself to say anything, and he didn't even have a weapon! It wasn't his fault, though, was it?! This was the cafeteria. Who in their right mind would bring a weapon to lunch?!

Layla kicked the floor as she prepared to jump, but at that moment, the spoon fell out of her pocket.

Ah.

All three contenders looked down at the same time.

Everything played out slowly right before their eyes. The spoon happened to fall right in front of Eterna, who was just passing through. She kicked the spoon, sending it flying into the air. It soared through the cafeteria until it finally landed right into the hand of the old woman who was in the middle of washing the dishes. She didn't think much about it—she didn't even have to look away to catch it. She began to wash the wayward spoon along with the rest of the cutlery.

Between the moment she'd grabbed it and the moment she'd started washing it, no more than half a second had passed.

Supple had wanted to stop her, but he hadn't made it in time. Disheartened, he fell to his knees.

Verner and Layla looked at each other without saying a word. The three of them had been mere seconds away from entering a violent brawl, but in the end, nothing had happened.

After staring at Verner for a short while, Layla finally sheathed her blade.

"Good!" she exclaimed after a pause.

Granted, not even she knew what was "good," but that was all right. She'd given up on thinking altogether. She'd managed to stand up to the freaks, and the spoon was now sparkly clean so there was no risk of anyone going after it—which was good!

Now that she was convinced she was the victor, Layla left the cafeteria with a smug look plastered on her face.

Verner, on the other hand, was mortified. He remained rooted in place, with no idea what to do. Suddenly, he felt a hand pat his shoulder gently. It was John.

"Verner... You know I'm your friend, right? You're important to me, so I have to tell you... I'm not sure you should go around trying to steal stuff that the saint used."

A single tear ran down Verner's cheek.

Chapter 12: Archmonsters

It had been a few days since Eterna had freaked out over her misunderstanding. Nothing of note had happened since then, and I was enjoying my new student life in my own way.

While Verner had been a loner during his first few weeks at the academy, he now hung out with Eterna—as well as Fiora and random dude—most of the time. The only issue was that he still spent every free moment he could get on muscle training. *What is he even trying to achieve?*

As for me, I was having a blast getting treated like royalty and seeing everyone fuss over me. It felt incredibly good to have everyone look at me with envy or admiration or to hear my praises being sung from the crowds. Yeah, to be honest, I was a bit of an attention whore.

Look at me all you want, peasants! Lose yourselves in my beauty! Oh, wait not you, shitty Four-eyed Pervert. You don't count. I wanna puke whenever I feel your eyes on me, you disgusting idiot.

You know what would improve my mood, though? Gazing at beautiful girls—like Eterna, for instance!

Double standards? What double standards?! Shut up!

Anyway, I had recently seen the light. I now knew my decision to come to the academy had been the right one...*hye he he.*

After I'd moved to the academy, I'd been given a stupidly large room that came with its own private bath. But I looked like a woman, if you catch my drift. No? Well, it meant that I was free to enter the women's bath! From the front door and everything, fair and square!

I just had to blurt out some random excuse about wanting to understand the students better or build bonds with my future knights—you know, that kind of bullshit—and I was free to get into the women's bath once a week without getting suspected of having questionable intentions! The best part was, for

whatever reason, girls would swarm the bathhouse whenever I went! I could get my fill of eye candy! It was my greatest joy these days.

That stuff makes me too frisky.

The bathhouse was like heaven on earth, a pink paradise as far as the eye could see. If I could somehow record what I saw, and make a movie out of it, it'd most definitely be rated X.

My time had finally come!

“Hey! You! Stop looking at Lady Ellize like that! And you too! Your impure thoughts are written all over your face. I'll kill you! Argh... These girls aren't ever proper knights yet. Why are they blessed by getting to see Lady Ellize's fair skin...?”

There was just one tiny problem. If I had to complain, it was that Scotterbrain spent her time chasing away any girls who dared approach me. Because of her, I only got to look! I hadn't had the chance to cop even a teensy little feel yet! If only she weren't in my way... I could've just gone all, “Wow! Yours are so big!” and grabbed boobs, butts, and thighs to my heart's content.

To make matters worse, Scotterbrain had tried to force me to wrap a towel around myself in the bathhouse. I'd seen enough anime to know that wasn't polite, though. *You should never touch the water with your towel, kids!*



I'd told Scotterbrain I'd much rather drop the towel to respect customs, but she'd fought me tooth and nail over it. In the end, we ended up settling on a deal—I'd use light magic to hide the important bits. With Enigma Light—the strongest defensive spell in the light magic repertory—no one could see my lady bits or my boobs, regardless of the angle.

I didn't really see the point of kicking up a fuss, since the women's and men's baths were separated anyway, but I had to play by Scotterbrain's rules. She wouldn't let me go to the communal bath otherwise, so I had no choice.

Anyway, I was enjoying my life here so much that, before I even knew it, it was already time for the first midterm examination.

I didn't have to take any exams, by the way. This school existed to nurture knights who'd protect the saint. There was really no reason for the saint herself—well, a fake one, but let's not sweat the details—to be tested.

I hated exams anyway, so I wasn't about to complain.

After the tests, it'd be time for the summer holiday. I was planning to have a good time. The other students would have homework to worry about, but I'd be free!

Verner would probably be out and about going on dates and flirting with the heroine.

I'm bored...so bored.

I needed a new pastime. I still trained, but I'd found a workaround that let me do it on semi-autopilot.

Usually, when people trained to increase their mana, they tried to accumulate as much mana as possible before circulating it inside their bodies. It was pretty similar to training to increase lung capacity. You had to breathe in and out several times, right? It was the same sort of deal.

Anyway, my point was that I'd created a magic spell that let me go through that process automatically. I'd been inspired by those things they used in hospitals... Uh, what were they called again? Oh, right! Artificial respirators!

Others couldn't see it, but I'd create a large magic aura around me that would

accumulate, circulate, and then dissipate mana. I just had to activate it whenever I wanted to train, then disable it when I was done. It was kinda like a cheat code that allowed me to get stronger with zero effort.

Working hard was a waste of time anyway. I was all about finding efficient workarounds that would allow me to take it easy. Hey, I wasn't ashamed to admit that I was a lazy bum!

But anyway, in a nutshell: I was bored to death.

To kill time, I snuck out to play a little prank on the large pack of monsters I knew the witch was trying to discreetly send over to the academy.

Light magic... BAM! And...dead!

I was sure the witch thought she was being subtle by making them take the long way around, but I couldn't be fooled that easily.

Do you know how many times I've played this game? I can see right through you!

If you left the army of monsters alone, they'd trudge along toward the school, destroying everything in their wake—including a whole country. They'd finally arrive at the academy in time for the final arc. The students would be waiting for them, ready to fight, but a lot of them would die. In most routes, Eterna would finally awaken her powers at that point and rid the school of the monsters after a long, tedious fight.

But yeah, I wasn't too keen on letting that happen. It was obviously much better to deal with annoying events like that preemptively!

Which brings me back to... BAAAAAM! Eat my magic blast! Light magic...BOOM! Fire magic...BOOM! Here, you guys can also have a taste of my water and thunder magic! BAM BAM BAM!

A little occasional exercise was good for the body, so I materialized a blade out of light magic and swung it around masterfully.

YEAAAAH! HA HA HA HA HA!!! COWER! FEAR ME! DIE DESPERATE AND HELPLESS!

One monster pretended to plead for its life to catch me off guard, but I beat it

at its own game. Its face when it understood I never had any intention to spare it... *Ha ha ha! Priceless!*

Aaaah, boy! Talk about refreshing! Truly, nothing beat slaughtering monsters in this world!

Well then, dear citizens of the random country that stood in the monster army's way...good luck with the cleanup!



The Lutein Kingdom, located in the east, was composed of a royal capital, seven cities, fifteen regions, and over a hundred villages. It had access to the sea, plenty of mountains, and a good amount of tourists who came looking to buy marine products and wild plants found in the mountains.

On most days, the royal capital of the Lutein Kingdom was bustling with activity, but on that fateful day, everything was different.

The people were scrambling to flee, carrying as many of their belongings as they possibly could. Why? Because a large army of monsters was approaching the city at an astonishing speed.

A battle that could've very well decided the fate of the kingdom had already started on the outskirts of the capital. Soldiers put their lives on the line, doing everything they could to protect their friends and families.

Every single soldier under the crown's command—including the mage division—had been mobilized, and reinforcements were hurrying over from every noble's domain. Volunteers had also assembled to help the troops. Every ruffian in the area had decided to join, declaring themselves heroes.

The citizens of Lutein were ready to put their disagreements past them and fight together for the survival of their homeland. They encouraged each other, trusted their previous enemies with their backs, mourned their deaths like family, and turned that pain into a newfound strength to stand up to the invaders.

Even the royal family rushed to the battlefield in an attempt to raise the morale of the troops. It was time for everyone to rise together against a common enemy.

“How surprising. These lowly humans sure are holding out quite well,” a huge demon mounted on a gigantic three-headed dog sneered.

The demon was over three meters tall and covered in jet-black fur. On top of his head rested a pair of sharp horns. If you were to take a closer look, you’d notice he resembled a monkey somewhat. His horrifically sinister aura stopped anyone from ever thinking of making such a comparison, though.

At any rate, it was clear that this beast was commanding the entire monster army. What in the world *was* he? He couldn’t be a regular monster, that much was clear to everyone.

By nature, monsters were wild beasts that had been turned evil by the witch’s powers. There weren’t any wild animals that looked like this demon, though. When monkeys were turned into monsters, they never grew so big, nor did they become so strong.

So what *was* this fearsome creature, if not a normal monster?

It was an archmonster—a much-feared super-monster that had been handcrafted by the witch.

In order to create them, the witch turned dozens of animals into monsters and trapped them in a small area, forcing them to fight one another. The monster that managed to survive and devour all the others would gain tremendous powers.

In most cases, the victorious monster would simply turn into a powerful beast. That had been the case for dragons and other such monsters Ellize had killed up until now, at least.

In fairy tales, dragons were often described as incredibly intelligent creatures that could communicate with humans, but there were no such records in this world. Naturally, dragons and the like were not archmonsters. They were almost as *strong* as them when it came to combat, but that was it. Archmonsters, on the other hand, had both brains and brawn.

More often than not, the monsters that successfully evolved into archmonsters came from species that were relatively similar to humans, like monkeys or goblins. Sometimes dogs, dolphins, or crows would also turn into

archmonsters. Either way, only intelligent species had a chance.

Naturally, humans could not be turned into archmonsters...or any sort of monsters for that matter. They were much too weak. If the witch were to try such a thing, her target would simply die on the spot.

While the *process* of creating an archmonster was technically quite straightforward, it was in fact incredibly difficult to pull off. There was a ninety-nine percent chance of failure. The reason was very simple—monsters that stood a chance, such as monkeys, were fairly weak and were usually killed off early by other creatures.

A few lucky ones would manage to hide or escape the claws and fangs of other beasts long enough to grow their powers. They'd profit off the others' kills by absorbing some energy wherever they could and bide their time.

However, even when that happened, there was no guarantee their body would be able to bear their newfound powers. The majority of them ended up dying regardless, unable to withstand such tremendous powers—just like humans.

As a result, archmonsters were few and far between. Despite the incredible difficulty it took to make them, the efforts were well worth it—the witch would gain trustworthy allies that could even command armies efficiently.

“Don't lose to fear! Face the monsters! Don't let them rule over your hearts!”

“We can do it! Don't give up!”

“If we die here, our homeland is gone! We need to stand firm!”

Even in the face of great peril, the people of Lutein didn't give up hope. Alas, they were outnumbered and far too weak... No matter how valiantly they fought, the outcome was crystal clear—they would eventually fall.

“We'll make it! We need to buy enough time for the people to flee!”

The archmonster (we'll call him the demon monkey for the time being) suddenly burst into laughter; the commanding officer's words of encouragement were just too funny. Was that guy an idiot? He'd managed to contradict himself in two little sentences. How could he tell his men they'd

make it, then say they needed to hold on long enough for the people to flee in the same breath? He had to know they wouldn't make it.

The demon monkey wanted to point out how ridiculous the human's words were. They were stalling for time, that was all it was. They'd already given up on surviving, on winning the fight to protect their country. Now that victory had escaped their grasp, the best they could do was to strive to save as many lives as possible. How sad. How pitiful!

The words of a loser trying to cheer his troops were truly pathetic.

"Now, now... I should take my time and have some fun with all of you," the demon monkey said, getting off the three-headed dog.

He landed right in the middle of the group of soldiers, crushing quite a few of them under him. He clutched his cudgel tightly and swung, scattering the men around him like leaves. They flew, the armor meant to protect them smashed as easily as biscuits.

Screams resounded.

"Don't falter! That one's the leader! Kill it!"

"If we defeat it, their formation will crumble!"

Soldiers rushed at the lone demon monkey. He laughed heartily at their desperate attempts, flinging the poor men that attacked him away with his cudgel. The sound of their armor getting crushed echoed through the battlefield as men—or what remained of them, at least—were hurled into the sky.

Archmonsters were as strong as dragons. They could easily destroy any ramparts, and no sword or spear was sharp enough to pierce their thick hide...to say nothing of their absurd endurance and magical defense.

Even the most elite of the elite, the magic knights that served in the saint's guard, couldn't hope to defeat an archmonster in one-on-one combat. A single magic knight was known to be stronger than an entire platoon, but only by banding together could they face the demon monkey with a real shot at victory.

As for regular soldiers...even hundreds of them wouldn't stand a chance without meticulous planning and arming themselves with the strongest

weapons beforehand. Fighting an archmonster head-on was a losing battle for regular soldiers otherwise—it'd be like throwing a hundred babies at a ravenous beast. A baby could whale on a bear all it wanted with its chubby little arms, but it wouldn't deal any damage. On the other hand, one hit from the archmonster was enough to kill them.

That was just how it was.

It would only be a matter of time before the last soldier fell and their country was free for the taking.

And yet, thanks to the time the soldiers had won in exchange for their lives—having realized they'd never achieve victory and return home—a miracle happened. Their efforts were rewarded.

"Fortune favors the bold," a clear, soft voice said in a foreign language.

Those who heard it felt their hearts flutter. At the same time, thousands—no, hundreds of thousands—of blades of light fell from the sky. The sparkling blades impaled monsters on their way down before they made their way to the soldiers. *Wield me*, they seemed to say.

Strangely enough, when the soldiers touched them, their wounds healed on the spot. They felt invigorated, their bodies light as feathers. Suddenly, they felt like anything was possible, like they could win this fight.

We can do this!

The brave men armed with blades of light lunged at the monsters, ready to show them that humans were not done yet.

An aurora filled the sky above them, and a young girl with blond hair finally descended.

"C-Could it be...? Is she...?"

"It's her! It's definitely her!"

The soldiers grew excited as they realized who had appeared. Some even forgot they were standing in the middle of a battlefield and stared at her, entranced.

She didn't seem to mind the attention at all; she simply looked down on the demon monkey.

"I see... So there was an archmonster here," she said softly. "I understand why the witch has been so quiet recently. To think she managed to assemble such an army."

"You... I get it now. You're the saint, aren't you?!"

The demon monkey had immediately understood that the girl looking down at him was the saint—the only hope of humanity—and clutched his cudgel.

If he could get rid of the saint here, the witch's victory would be assured. Her appearance here was completely unexpected, but it was a golden opportunity nonetheless.

"How brazen of you to show up here, foolish saint. I wonder how much despair your kind will show me if I drag your lifeless body across the land."

"I wonder... I must say I hadn't put much thought into this. The only thing I can tell you is that no one will lose hope just because I die. Humans do not abandon hope, not ever. And..." Ellize trailed off, gathering light into her palms as she spoke. She brought both hands to her chest before spreading her arms. "Even if I were to fall, I can assure you it wouldn't be now. Cut your coat according to your cloth," she concluded, reciting the final sentence in English.

The light that was escaping from her palms turned into countless blades. They flew outward, slicing the monsters apart one after the other. In the blink of an eye, most of them had been eradicated.

The demon monkey seemed to panic a little and hurriedly yelled out orders. "Kill her! Destroy her!"

The three-headed dog breathed out fire. Any remaining monsters that were able to attack from afar soon joined in. The flying monsters followed a little later, rushing at Ellize as fast as they could. The fire hit Ellize first. Sadly for them, though, she deflected it with one hand and used it to counterattack.

It was, in fact, the same barrier she'd used at the academy. The reflected fire was now three times as powerful.

She didn't give the monsters any time to reorganize themselves; she raised her index in front of her lips.

"Out of the mouth comes evil," she said in English.

Her spell activated. The monsters braced themselves for what was to come, but...nothing happened. Had she messed up her spell?

One of the monsters started laughing at her mistake. The chuckle had barely left its lips when a bolt of lightning fell from the sky, killing it on the spot.

"GIIII?! GAAAH!!!"

Another monster, who had opened its mouth to scream, suffered the same fate. Then another, and another...

"Wh-What's happening?!" one of the soldiers couldn't help but ask.

Fortunately, lightning didn't strike him. The saint's allies would not be attacked by the heavens.

The monsters had no idea what was happening to them, and they continued to be decimated one after the other.

The answer was very simple—whenever a monster made a sound, it'd be silenced by thunder.

Every time a bolt of lightning fell from the sky, another monster would scream in horror. Yet another bolt of lightning would soon follow, and the vicious cycle would continue until only charred corpses remained in the witch's army.

Ellize didn't wait for the thunder to finish the job, though. She grabbed a blade of light and started mowing down monsters herself. With a swing of her blade, the first row of monsters were sliced into halves, even reaching the ones which were far away.

She continued with a second blow, then a third, a fourth, a fifth... Her speed was supernatural, and there was nothing the monsters could do to guard against her.

Eventually, only the demon monkey was left. He gritted his teeth and glared at Ellize, mad with rage, but didn't say a thing. He was only still alive because he'd understood quickly enough that any noise would've sent him right to the

afterlife.

The problem had been that, although *he* had understood Ellize's ploy, he'd had no way to warn his allies. As badly as he'd wanted to warn them not to make a sound, he would've been struck by lightning the moment he opened his mouth.

The archmonster couldn't command his troops. Even the greatest officer couldn't win a battle if he couldn't communicate with his men. When speaking became a death sentence, there was no way to lead. What a fearsome tactic.

Writing could've been an option in different circumstances, but in the midst of a battle, it was completely impossible.

The demon monkey lunged at Ellize, still completely silent. Before he could get to her, though, he was stopped by dozens of soldiers stabbing at him with their blades of light.

Ellize remained perfectly still, her trademark smile plastered on her lips.

The demon fell to the ground and kneeled in front of Ellize. He clasped his hands in front of him as if to pray. He looked just as if he was begging for forgiveness. In fact, that's most likely what he was trying to do—beg for his life.

Ellize walked up to the demon, her pace unhurried.

"Saint! It's dangerous! Please step back!"

"He's right! You shouldn't show that monster any pity!"

"It must be a ploy to make you lower your guard! Don't get too close!"

The soldiers pleaded with Ellize to be careful, but she didn't heed their warnings. When she finally reached the beast, she leaned forward and extended her hand.

The saint was still the saint, regardless of the circumstances. No one was as compassionate as she was. She couldn't bring herself to turn her back on anyone, or *anything*—even the worst of fiends.

Unfortunately, that turned out to be a mistake.

Even with the best intentions in the world, there were beings that were

hopelessly evil, beyond saving. They'd trample on people's sympathy; they'd do anything for the sake of victory. They were even dirtier than feces.

The demon monkey was one such being, and once Ellize was close enough, he suddenly reached out and grabbed her hand.

"Saint!" one of the soldiers yelled, readying an arrow.

"Wait! Don't shoot! You may hurt the saint!"

The demon monkey clenched Ellize's small, frail body in his large palm. He was trying to crush her in his hand.

An ominous cracking noise resounded, and the monster's mouth twisted into a warped smile. His happiness was short-lived, however. The next moment, he felt a sharp pang of pain from his hand, and his face contorted instead. His fingers were broken.

Ellize had protected herself with defensive magic and used her usual barrier. Anything that tried to hurt her would suffer three times the damage instead. As a result, the demon monkey hadn't hurt Ellize, he'd broken his own fingers.

He groaned and shivered in pain, releasing Ellize in the process.

"You! You tricked me... You only pretended to..."

Ellize seemed troubled, as if she didn't know how to react. For just a split second, however, she smiled. It was fleeting enough that anyone who hadn't been paying close attention to her expression would've missed it.

She then turned her back to the monster.

Why had she smiled? Was she laughing at the foolish demon for believing it had succeeded in tricking her, only to be deceived instead?

Impossible.

The knights were all convinced the expression she'd shown was a sad smile. She'd wanted to believe in the monster, but he had broken her trust... Or maybe she had laughed at herself for failing to believe in the monster completely.

Either way, she'd acted out of the kindness of her heart.

Behind Ellize, the demon monkey was struck by lightning, and the curtain finally fell on the gruesome fight for survival for the people of Lutein.

Chapter 13: Accomplice

After taking out my frustration on my favorite punching bags—monsters—I discreetly returned to the academy.

My goal was to make it back to my room without Layla noticing so I could pretend I hadn't taken a single step outside. If she learned that I'd gone out to have fun without a word, she'd nag me for hours.

I loved to preach and scold people using the most random and ridiculous arguments I could think of, but I absolutely loathed being on the receiving end—especially if I was in the wrong.

I just liked being right and looking down on people. *I'm the one in charge, not you, okay?!*

"Lady Ellize?"

AAAAAH!!! Did she find me?! W-W-Wait! Scotterbrain! Let's calm down first! I promise I didn't go out to fight monsters again. I was just taking a walk! Honest!

I turned around, panicked, to find...Verner standing behind me.

It's only you, huh? Don't scare me like that.

"What are you up to, Lady Ellize? You look like you're trying to avoid someone... Miss Layla, perhaps?"

Right on the money. I didn't take him for the perceptive kind.

Actually, I was more curious about why Verner was walking around at this time. The sun had already set, and we were in the middle of the summer holiday.

My room wasn't located in the girl's dormitory, but in a separate building within the academy. It made sense for me to be here.

The main academy building had five floors. The top floor, on which I lived, was mostly used to welcome guests—usually royalty. The rooms there were excessively lavish, so they weren't used most of the time.

I'd told the school I was all right with getting a simple room in the girl's dormitory—actually, I would've *loved* to get one—but they'd refused.

As for Layla, she usually stood guard in front of my room and didn't come in unless she had a reason to. The guards had a separate office they could rest in.

Honestly, I really wished she'd stop standing in front of my door all day. Couldn't she...go on walks? Rest? Eat?

For the love of God, Layla, please take breaks!

I needed to find a moment to sneak into my room without her seeing me.

Going out had been very easy. Layla was only human, after all. It was impossible for anyone to stay upright in the same position all day; people needed sleep at one point or another.

Layla was the only member of my personal guard who'd followed me to the academy, so whenever she needed to catch some z's, students—selected for their outstanding skills—were put in charge of protecting me instead.

Under normal circumstances, a few more of my guards would've followed me here, but I'd refused. Knights were very precious in this world. I couldn't have them waste their time sitting around and twiddling their thumbs at school.

In the game, the original Ellize always had a large entourage of guards with her whenever she went somewhere, but that also meant there weren't enough knights to protect cities or villages.

I didn't even need protection in the first place! Plus, the whole purpose of this school was to train future knights. Every student here could fight to some extent. The security was even better than at my castle.

Layla had stubbornly refused to listen to me, though, so here she was. Unfortunately for her, she couldn't be by my side at all times no matter how hard she tried. That meant others had to watch me in her stead at least while she slept.

Anyway, I'd taken advantage of Layla's nap time to make my escape.

As I'd already mentioned, I had other students watching me, but they were nothing compared to Layla. First of all, they usually had their back to my door to

monitor for potential intruders. That was the logical course of action—if you were trying to protect someone, you wouldn't watch them, you'd look out for outside threats. Only an idiot would stare at my door the whole time.

But that also meant that I was free to sneak out as long as I concealed the noise of the door opening with wind magic. If it were Layla, she would've noticed regardless of the noise, though. She'd know that something was wrong the second she felt magic mess with the natural flow of the air.

Anyway, my next step would be to use light magic to change the way shadows and reflections appeared. I'd just need to cast a little spell on the door, and I'd be free to slip through the cracks and be on my way.

The spell I cast on the door was one of my originals. I called it Automated Response. Whenever Layla called out to me to check if I was still there, it would answer "of course I am" using my voice.

Unless there was an emergency, a knight wouldn't enter their master's room, so no one would know I wasn't really there.

The difficult part was sneaking into my room now that Layla was back at her post.

By the way, flying and getting in through the window was completely impossible. There *was* a window, but bars had been installed to prevent intruders from breaking in. They were delicately designed bars and looked pretty good—very unlike a prison's windows—but there was still no way for me to squeeze past them.

Anyway, none of this mattered right now! Why was Verner walking alone in the academy during the holidays?

"I just returned a book at the library. I'm on my way back to the dorms," he explained.

Oh, that's a pretty appropriate answer for a student. So he does that stuff during the holiday too?

They did have homework to complete before the next semester started, so it wasn't all that strange for him to visit the library.

“What about you, Lady Ellize?”

Urgh... I, ahem, you know... I...just wanted to walk for a bit! Doesn't everyone want to wander aimlessly alone from time to time? It's a thing, right? Right?

I disclosed that I was looking for a way to enter my room without Layla noticing.

“I see. Let me help, then. I'll distract Miss Layla for you, how does that sound?”

For real?! You're a lifesaver Verner! Just as you'd expect, the protagonist sure is something else.

Now that we had a plan, it was time to put it into action!

I trust you, Verner! Distract her! I'm sure it'll go well. Layla looks like she's good at her job, but at the end of the day, she's still just Scotterbrain.

Spoilers: it did not go well.

I'll skip to the end: she'd caught us both, and she was currently nagging our ears off.

Daaaamn! Why was she only weirdly hyper-efficient in situations like these?! *You're Scotterbrain, aren't you?! Act like it!*

Our plan hadn't been good enough. Verner was supposed to attract Layla's attention by talking to her and luring her away from the door. I was supposed to use that opportunity to dash inside.

Well, anyway... Let's just say that since I was the *only* person staying on the fifth floor, Verner suddenly popping up for a chat wasn't all that natural. *He was bound to look suspicious from the start, wasn't he?*

But Layla wasn't supposed to be that good at guarding Ellize in the game!

I'd already mentioned it a while ago, but the original Ellize had loved to bully the students here, and for some time, she'd also lived in the very room I was currently using.

Obviously, Layla had followed her. If you went to the fifth floor during your

free time, you'd get to happily chat with her! If anything, she *liked* talking to Verner. It always raised her affection level.

In the game, it was completely unheard of that she'd view Verner as if he was a suspicious character, stop him, and try to punish him. In the end, I'd had no choice but to step in to clear his name. Layla had stopped wanting to kill Verner, but she'd ended up lecturing us instead.

Sorry, Verner. That one's on me. Forgive me, all right?

Still, it had been kind of fun to get caught like that with an accomplice, like we were two kids causing trouble. It reminded me of all the pranks I'd pulled with my friends back in my old life.

Being friends with another stupid boy was just a lot of fun. It got me wondering—when exactly *had* I become a loner?

Back when I was a kid I'd had plenty of friends, but as we grew up, I guess they started noticing how weird I was... *Oh well.*

Anyway, thanks, Verner. I enjoyed hanging with you. Next time, let's try to avoid getting caught— No, I guess we can just do something that won't get us in trouble. By the way, now that we're friends, I'm done talking to you politely.

While I'd never done that in my head, I always spoke to him politely in person.

Now we're bros, dude.



To Verner, the night's coincidence had been almost too good to be true.

Magic academy students always had plenty of homework during the summer holiday. Being a skilled fighter was a requirement of the academy, obviously, but prospective knights weren't only fighters. They needed to be cultivated to protect and support the saint in all kinds of ways.

As a result, the students had to be more well-learned than the people who were employed by royalty, and they only had three years to acquire all that knowledge on top of their usual training.

That meant constant work, both academic and physical. They had to learn how to read and write, learn arithmetic, memorize facts about the previous

saints and witches—down to their names and every detail or misdeed of their lives—study history, analyze old battles, and practice etiquette—including table manners, the proper way to escort noble ladies, etc...

They were expected to remember all of these things. The most important things for a student of the academy were their drive and ambition. It wasn't good enough to use the summer holidays to rest. Those who made that mistake were mercilessly kicked out of the academy.

The knights were in charge of the saint's protection—the only hope of humanity. They couldn't choose their own comfort over that mission. Even one slipup, one moment of inattention could result in the saint's brutal murder by a monster or the witch herself.

And if that were to happen, humanity would once again go through a terrible dark age, just like it had two generations ago.

As such, slacking off and resting during the holidays was completely out of the question.

Finishing all of the assignments was the bare minimum, and those who couldn't accomplish at least that—let alone study more out of their own volition—would be expelled immediately when the next semester started.

Naturally, the students weren't aware of that. The teachers wanted to see the choices they'd make without being notified of the rule.

Verner didn't need to know any of that to be diligent. His goal was to join the saint's personal guard, so he had to become stronger. He didn't care about anything else.

Ellize was the greatest saint in history. If he hoped to stand by her side, he couldn't be idle. He knew that simply going through the curriculum without pushing himself wouldn't cut it.

He'd finished all of his homework on the first day of vacation after borrowing all of the necessary material from the library. Then, he'd decided to dedicate the rest of his time to training.

He'd entered the academy to return the books to the library, since he didn't need them anymore. As he rushed back to his dorm, hoping to squeeze some

more training in, he happened to spot Ellize sneaking around as discreetly as she could.

“Lady Ellize?”

“Ah!”

He’d startled her by calling out to her so suddenly, but thanks to that, he’d heard the cutest yelp ever. Ellize didn’t usually let out sounds like that, and seeing her flustered was a nice change of pace.

Verner was almost certain no one else had ever seen her like this and couldn’t help but bask in a sense of superiority for a moment.

“V-Verner... It’s you. You scared me.”

“What are you up to, Lady Ellize? You look like you’re trying to avoid someone... Miss Layla, perhaps?”

He immediately understood that he was right by the way Ellize froze.

She tried to deflect and returned the question. “By the way, Verner, why are you here?”

“I just returned a book at the library. I’m on my way back to the dorms,” he answered before probing again. “What about you, Lady Ellize?”

“Me? Hmm... I...was just taking a walk. Sometimes I just feel like walking alone for a while, you see. The issue is that I didn’t tell Layla... She was taking a nap when I went out, and... Well, I’m trying to find a way to go back to my room without her noticing,” she answered while averting her eyes.

A guard was supposed to accompany the saint at all times, no matter where she went. She was a very important person, so it was a given. Still, Verner could understand how that might feel a bit stifling sometimes. She was the saint, but she was also human.

Strangely enough, that fact had never dawned on Verner until that moment. He had always thought that Ellize was out of his reach. She was like a goddess in a way, ethereal and utterly different from him, a mere man.

Now that he thought of her as another human being, he felt like the distance between the two of them had shrunk, as if by magic, and he was over the

moon.

“I see. Let me help, then. I’ll distract Miss Layla for you, how does that sound?”

“Y-You wouldn’t mind? But I’d feel bad for making you do something like this... Layla doesn’t really have a sense of humor, so—”

“I don’t mind. Please let me do this for you. A knight should always do everything in his power to help the saint, right? Well, I’m still only a student, but...”

After Ellize agreed to let him come with her, the pair made their way to the fifth floor, making sure not to be seen by anyone.

As expected, Layla was standing guard in front of the door of Ellize’s room.

Layla Scott. Verner admired her a lot...but not in the same way as he admired Ellize, of course.

She was Ellize’s closest support, and Verner’s dream was to eventually reach that position. She was always by her side, protecting and serving her. Every knight and aspiring knight dreamed of being in her shoes.

While Verner looked up to Layla, he was also very jealous of her. He wanted to snatch her position and become the one Ellize trusted the most, though he was all too aware that he had a long way to go until then. He was just a student, after all.

It wasn’t the time for such thoughts, though. He tried to focus on what was important at the moment—figuring out how to distract the strongest knight. He needed to create an opening for Ellize.

“Lady Ellize, I’ll attract her attention and get her away from the door. Please sneak in during that time.”

“All right!” Ellize nodded before starting to laugh.

“Lady Ellize?”

“It’s nothing! I just thought it was a little funny. I feel like we’re two kids conspiring together to pull a prank on adults. I... If I had a friend, that’s probably what it would be like,” she explained with a smile.

She looked even more beautiful than usual—if that was at all possible.

Verner averted his eyes immediately.

That was dangerous, he thought.

He was convinced that if he'd looked at her smile one moment longer his heart would've most likely stopped altogether, and his brain would've turned to mush. Who could think in the face of such beauty?

"W-Well then... I'll get going, Lady Ellize," Verner declared before stepping forward hurriedly.

However, Verner hadn't thought of the fact that he'd look incredibly suspicious if he suddenly showed up in an area where only the saint and her guard were supposed to be.

Layla had started questioning him, and she was just about ready to arrest him when Ellize had jumped to his rescue. A crushing defeat for the two of them.

They then had to sit through a lengthy lecture, courtesy of Layla.

"She sure yelled at us," Ellize commented after the hellish ten minutes were finally over. "I'm sorry I dragged you into this, Verner. This was all my fault..."

"Please don't apologize. I'm the one who offered to help..." he answered with a small, embarrassed laugh.

He'd been completely useless.

He was starting to feel down about it when Ellize whispered, "I had a lot of fun, you know? Let's hang out again when we get a chance. We'll try not to get into trouble."

"You'd like to...hang out with me again?"

"If you feel like it."

"Of course I feel like it! I completely feel like it!" Verner scrambled to say.

Ellize smiled, a satisfied look appearing on her face as she was dragged away by Layla.

Right before she stepped into her room, she looked over her shoulder and added, "See you tomorrow, Verner!"



The door closed immediately after.

Verner was in a daze. He finally came back to his senses when Layla shooed him away.

As he went down the stairs, Ellize's last words kept coming back to him again and again, filling every corner of his brain.

"See you tomorrow," she said... "See you tomorrow, Verner."

Up until now, she'd maintained a certain distance from him, but now she was treating him like a friend. That was progress; they'd finally grown closer.

Verner was so happy that he skipped down the road, striking triumphant poses every two steps.

Chapter 14: Martial Tournament

The super-duper fun holiday eventually ended, and school resumed. Not that I was complaining. I hadn't done much during the holiday. In fact, I'd been bored out of my mind most of the time.

The only noteworthy thing that had happened recently was receiving a thank-you letter—along with a hefty amount of gold and silver—from the Lutein Kingdom. Oh yeah, and the entire royal family had shown up at the academy to thank me, which outed the fact that I'd gone to their kingdom to Layla.

You really can't hide your crimes forever...

Anyway, I'd reflected on my actions, as Layla requested.

One... Two... Three... All right, that's enough reflection. I'll probably do it again anyway, but yeah.

I was the type who tended to conveniently forget stuff that didn't go my way.

Bullying monsters was one of my only joys in this world. If that was taken away from me, I'd seriously risk dying of boredom.

With the summer holiday out of the way, the next big event, as I'd mentioned before, was the first martial tournament of the year.

During the first martial tournament, students would only face people of the same grade. During the second one, though, contestants were mixed.

Students would compete against their peers twice a year—six times in total during their three years of education. *Kuon no Sanka* only covered a one-year period, though, so you only had to worry about two of them.

Unlike most events, the martial tournaments were played like fights. Your results would depend on how well you'd trained little Verner beforehand.

Most players lost to Marie—an incredibly tough girl—and finished second. The only way to beat her in your first run was to give up on romance altogether and spend at least ninety percent of your free time on training. That was just

how strong Marie was.

For some reason, when she joined your party she magically became weaker than Verner, though. *That's just how those games are, I guess.*

Needless to say, Marie was also a dateable heroine. She was a kuudere with shoulder-length blue hair and was super popular among the players. *Everyone loves a good ice queen character, right?*

Regardless of how the main character fared at the tournament, one of the witch's underlings would appear right after to try to assassinate the saint. The ensuing fight wasn't very hard. Even if your Verner wasn't all that great, you wouldn't struggle to defeat the mini-boss.

On top of that, Marie always stepped in to help. Even with a low-leveled Verner, it was almost impossible to lose.

Anyway, on top of being weak, the mini-boss was a complete idiot. It would try to attack Ellize instead of Eterna.

(If you were wondering why Ellize was at the academy, she'd been invited to watch the tournament as a special guest.)

At that point in the story, almost no one knew that Ellize was a fake. Verner and his friends naturally stepped in to protect her to follow their duty as knights-to-be.

Most players had probably wished they could've let Ellize die instead of helping her—I know I certainly had—but the game didn't give us a choice. A lot of us—including me, naturally—had tried to purposefully lose the fight to bypass that, but even if Verner and his group lost, Layla would finish the mini-boss before it reached Ellize. On top of that, losing meant that Marie would hate your guts and never show up again, making it impossible to romance her, so it was kind of pointless.

Anyway, I was certain that I'd be the target of the attack this time around too.

I wasn't too worried, though. The mini-boss wasn't even an archmonster. He wouldn't be able to leave a scratch on me no matter what.

I'll just beat him into a pulp the moment he comes out, save us all the trouble.

I was hoping it would be a little fun at least, like radio calisthenics. Actually, it wasn't fair to compare the two—at least radio calisthenics was good for your health.

The only issue was that when the mini-boss showed up, a few knights would jump in to stop him and end up instantly killed. This world *really* wasn't nice to nameless extras.

Layla's voice roused me from my thoughts. "Lady Ellize, the tournament will start soon."

Already? Then let's go!

The contenders were all much too weak to impress me, and I didn't care much about the results, but at least it would be a decent way to kill some time.

I remembered enjoying combat sports and martial arts matches back when I was still a man.

While this tournament was called a "martial tournament," using swords and magic was A-OK. And since the matches weren't scripted, it'd definitely be entertaining.

Given that I was the saint, I was always invited to watch these tournaments. In fact, I'd watched most of them ever since I was ten years old. But I digress.

I followed Layla to the school's sports ground. An arena had been built there especially for the occasion.

A square arena had been made out of stones, measuring around thirty meters on each side, and slightly elevated so the audience had to look up to see the fighters. A fence surrounded the arena, and chairs were lined up all around it. It was somewhat similar to a pro wrestling ring, actually.

Anyway, there were also little towers which boasted luxurious seats behind the regular chairs. That was where I would sit. I wasn't too fond of that spot, though. VIP seats were supposed to be on the first row, right? Why was I placed so far away?

Are you dumb? Do you all hate me, huh? Is that it? Lemme in the front row, I wanna see!!!

I tried to make a scene to get a first-row seat, but the headmaster—a forty-year-old geezer—adamantly refused.

“I apologize, Lady Ellize. As you know, your security is the most important thing. We cannot run the risk of you getting hurt if a student performs a spell badly or throws a sword in the wrong direction. Please watch the competition from a safe distance.”

By the way, the headmaster used to be the head of the former saint’s guard, and he was well-regarded by most people. The truth, however, was that he was a traitor who secretly communicated with the witch. He ended up being one of the bosses of the game, so I always kept an eye on him.

He was called Dias Dias—first name, Dias, last name, Dias. Yeah. If he’d been Japanese, he might’ve been called Yamada Yamada.

Why aren’t there any respectable men in this academy? First Supple Ment, then him...

The tournament finally started and...it was kinda entertaining, I guess.

If I were to describe it from the point of view of someone from my original world, I’d say it was amazing. The students performed all kinds of ridiculous moves and blasted magic spells everywhere. They looked more like anime characters than like humans. But as someone who’d lived in this world for quite some time now...meh. They all kinda sucked.

The only people I ever saw training or fighting on a regular basis were elite guards—like Layla—so I guess it wasn’t really fair of me to compare them to students, but, I don’t know...watching them fight reminded me how good Layla really actually was.

Actually, she was already pretty damn amazing when she was a student. She’d dominated every tournament she’d taken part in back then. She was a *beast*.

Who’s the idiot who decided to nickname such an amazing girl Scotterbrain, huh? Anyway, what do you think of their performance, Miss Scotterbrain?

“You’re asking for my opinion? There are quite a few impressive students this year. I can’t get too complacent or they’ll catch up to me in no time.”

Oh? For real? Well, I guess they're still better than those klutzes from the Lutein Kingdom.

“Verner, Aina Fox, John, and Marie Jett, in particular, are diamonds in the rough. Verner still lacks technique, but his foundation is remarkable. Aina Fox doesn't use flashy moves, but she's put in the work. Her basics are well-polished. I wouldn't expect anything else from a descendant of the Fox family, naturally. As for John...he served as a soldier, didn't he? His experience shines through, and he has a good mindset when it comes to combat. Finally, Marie Jett is quite proficient both in swordplay and magic. Her technique is already on par with most knights, even though she doesn't have the strength to match it yet. She's a strong contender this year. To be honest, I think she might win.”

Layla had just raised four names: Verner, our MC; Marie, the strongest fighter; Aina Fox, whom I'll admit I'd completely forgotten about since she still hadn't tried to assassinate me; and, uh...the other guy, whose name I'd already forgotten.

So what's-his-face was strong, huh?

I was a bit saddened that Eterna's name hadn't come up. I guess that's just how it was, though. She was pretty much invincible, but since she hadn't awakened her saintly powers, she wasn't all that strong yet.

The tournament went by in the blink of an eye. Before I knew it, it was already time for the semifinals. As Layla had expected, Verner, Marie, Aina, and random dude remained.

What a discerning eye.

The first semifinal match had the two heroines face off. Marie had shoulder-length blue hair, while Aina wore her long red hair in pigtails. On top of that, the former specialized in ice magic, while the latter used fire spells. They contrasted in every way.

“I've seen your matches. You're pretty good. You might have had a shot at winning... If I wasn't here, that is,” Aina declared.

Marie didn't answer.

“I'm not like you lot! I can't afford to lose here. My father's honor is on the

line. It wouldn't do to disgrace a member of the saint's guard, would it?"

"I guess not?"

Oh no, ladies and gentleman, that sounds like trouble! Aina suddenly raises a flag! Is the red-haired contestant courting defeat? Everyone knows that babbling about your life before a battle and looking down on your opponent always leads to a crushing loooss! A terrible mistake on her part. A terrible mistake, indeed!

Anyway, Marie predictably ended up winning the fight, but she was a little downtrodden because Aina had refused to shake her hand.

It was then time for Verner and random dude to compete. It was a close call, but Verner eventually triumphed over his opponent.

The final would be Verner vs. Marie.

Getting that far on the first playthrough was pretty much expected. That last fight was where most players stumbled, though. Defeating Marie on the first run was quite a challenge—she'd crushed me when I'd tried.

You could actually beat her by cheating a little—basically through TASing and using a ridiculous weapon that looked like a daikon radish. That stuff was impossible if you played normally, though.

The Verner from this world would most likely lose.

From your second run onward, you'd be stronger thanks to the experience you'd gained and techniques you'd learned in your previous playthroughs. Unfortunately, it didn't seem like this Verner had inherited anything.

In order to win without cheating, and without your previous runs helping you, you really had to devote all your free time to training. Obviously, that meant ignoring both the heroines and every single event, but—

Wait a minute... Verner is doing ridiculous shit like that!

The commentator's voice echoed in the arena. "The victor has finally been decided! Congratulations, Verner!"

He really did win.

He'd managed to win solely thanks to his physical strength. He'd wielded a huge claymore, and even when Marie had immobilized him with her ice, he'd pulled through and freed himself by using his dark powers and muscles.

What the hell? He really didn't do anything else but train?

I supposed not. In a normal run, he would've been chummy with at least five or six girls by now, but I'd never seen any girls—besides Eterna—even speak to him.

Fiora, you say? She doesn't count, she's not even in the game. And she doesn't seem interested in Verner anyway. If anything, she looks closer to random dude—god knows why. Anyway, Verner... Bro... What are you doing? You're gonna end up with the bodybuilding♂ ending, I swear.

You need to start hitting on your girl! Actually, you can even try dating two or three at the same time! It doesn't matter, so get to activating Casanova mode, will you? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?! How can you call yourself a dating sim protagonist?!

Marie and Verner were still standing in the ring. They seemed to be praising each other's martial skills, but he clearly hadn't raised any flags. They were just chatting like two martial artists exchanging pointers—no flirting at all.

It should've been the perfect timing to start a relationship with her, but nooo! Whatever.

Now that the tournament was over, it wouldn't be long before the villain made its appearance.

Five, four, three, two, one, and...here he comes!

A giant suddenly fell from the sky, landing right in the middle of the ring and shattering it.

"Where is...the saint? Kill...saint. I...kill... Witch...praise...me."

As expected, the mini-boss sounded like a total moron.

By the way, his name was Pochi. He was a four-meter-tall werewolf. Basically, he had the head of a wolf and the body of a human—only covered in thick, black fur. Actually, to be completely accurate, Pochi had *initially* been a dog.

He'd only started looking more like a wolf during the process to make him into an archmonster, so perhaps calling him a weredog was more accurate.

As long as he kept his mouth shut and didn't try to do anything, he actually looked pretty strong. Unfortunately, that was all ruined by the fact that he was a complete idiot.

Just like the monkey I'd bulli—uh, fought—before, Pochi here had gone through the archmonster creation process and had emerged victor of the bloodbath.

The thing was...he was too dumb to become an archmonster. A dog was loyal to his master no matter what. That was a good quality in theory, but the only thing that ran through Pochi's head was getting pets from the witch. Naturally, he couldn't create elaborate plans, lead armies, or think of anything that would benefit the witch in the long run.

Ever heard of puppies that had been encouraged to play bite by their masters because they thought it was cute, only for them to keep the habit even after they'd grown into large dogs? Well, Pochi was just like that.

In short, the witch was terrible at training dogs and it showed. She'd tried to dump her useless mongrel into the archmonster process so he'd become food for another servant, but it had backfired, and she'd found herself stuck with that idiot.

On top of lacking the brains, he wasn't nearly as strong as the monkey from last time. He was barely stronger than a regular monster.

If you looked closely, there were scars all over his body. Most had been left by the witch herself when she'd punished him, but a few had been caused by other monsters. Pochi was basically a punching bag for them. He wasn't useful for much else anyway.

Even after all that, Pochi still wanted nothing more than to be praised by his master, which had prompted him to arbitrarily attack the saint.

In the game, all his appearance had accomplished was strengthening the player's suspicions that the witch might be hiding out in the school.

Poor witch. She was stuck with such an eager, but totally useless, subordinate.

Anyway, the small fry spotted me and approached me in long strides.

“Saint... Kill... I...get pets... I...not trash.”

Dumb dog. Like hell you can kill me. Know your place, small fry.

I'd already strengthened my body with magic. He could come at me as hard as he wanted, he wouldn't leave a scratch on me.

Actually, I also put up my usual barrier, so if you attack me you'll probably die on the spot.

I remained seated in my chair to show everyone I wasn't scared at all and looked down at the dog.

Aww... He looks kinda pitiful, though.

“Stop... Don't...look at me...that way! Don't pity me!” Mister Small Fry erupted, lunging at me with his fist raised.

Layla reached for her sword, but there was no need. As soon as he slammed his fist into my barrier, he'd die. The end.

“Lady Ellize!”

Right before Pochi's fist could reach me, though, Verner jumped in and mercilessly struck the dog's face with his sword.

Pochi faltered, but his face was perfectly fine.

H-Hey, Verner! That's a training sword! It doesn't cut! Even if you're fighting a weakling, it's not gonna do much!

“Don't...bother me!!!” the weredog roared, swinging at Verner.

Marie froze his arm before it could reach the protagonist with a well-timed spell. Eterna, Fiora, random dude, and Four-Eyed Pervert also jumped in to help Verner.

“Everyone!”

“Don't try to act cool all on your own!”

“Let's protect the saint together!”

“Did you forget I was here too?”

It was all fine and dandy seeing them get excited over protecting me, but...

Umm... I don't need you guys to protect me, you know? I'm more than qualified enough to handle myself. Actually, Pochi here would already be dead if you hadn't stepped in.

I was getting seriously pissed at being treated like a weakling who needed their protection.

Should I just step up and destroy him anyway? It might be a bit awkward, but is that my problem? You know what? I'll just go for it. Let's go! Light magi—

"Lady Ellize, please wait!" Layla stopped me. "Could you leave it to them this time?"

What? Scotterbrain, what're you on about?

"They're trying to do their duty as knights. I know you could defeat that monster without anyone's help, but I hope you'll allow them to show you their determination instead. I have a strong feeling we shouldn't take this moment away from them. This fight will surely become a defining step for them."

This is all in your head, Scotterbrain. They won't even get any exp or stat boosts out of this. As a player, I didn't even want to finish this fight.

It wasn't often my dear Scotterbrain asked me for favors, though, so I'd listen for once and sit back.

That being said, I was a bit worried about Verner. He was trying to fight a monster with a training sword.

In the game, it wasn't really an issue. You also had a training sword in hand, but the system gave it the stats of whatever weapon you'd had equipped before the tournament. Reality wasn't as convenient, though.

I decided the least I could do was send a better weapon his way.

Earth magic, yeah!

I messed a little with the component—or whatever—of the earth and created a sword made of a sturdy, yet light, alloy.

Here you go, Verner! I kinda winged this, so no need to give it back!

“Thank you, Lady Ellize! I know I can do it now!”



With his new sword in hand, Verner hacked at Pochi with everything he had.
Doing good!

I was pretty impressed with his performance. For some reason, Layla started looking at me funny.

What's up? Something wrong?

"No... It's nothing."

You're a bit of a weirdo sometimes, Scotterbrain.

Anyway, the fight was as good as over. Verner and his friends had emerged victorious, and the useless mutt was on the floor.

"Witch... I...do my best...for you. I...do better...so...give hugs..."

That sounds pretty unlikely. You're a bit too big for her to hug.

Was I being too mean? I liked small cute dogs and all, but I was kinda scared of large dogs. Actually, I hated them. Shiba Inus were the biggest I could tolerate—anything bigger was a major no-no.

While I was thinking of the dogs I liked or hated, Pochi dragged his body my way and started whimpering, pushing his head into my hands.

Hmm... I'm not your beloved witch, you know?

Surprisingly enough, his fur felt nice and soft against my hands. Maybe big dogs weren't all that bad either.

"Lady Ellize... This monster is..."

Layla looked confused. She was probably wondering why Pochi was so damn weak.

I explained to everyone that this poor dog had failed to become an archmonster. I even disclosed that he was originally a good boy that hadn't wanted anything but pets. It would've been a little shady for me to know that stuff, though, so I pretended it was just a hunch.

"Witch..." Pochi whined.

You're still awake? Come on, take a little nap. No one will get mad, it's all

right.

Actually, if it stayed up, I was a bit scared it'd suddenly notice I wasn't the witch at all and try to bite me.

So please fall asleep quickly. Please. Good night, Pochi.

The overly large puppy quieted down.

Everyone's staring, so I should probably stop petting him soon, right?

Chapter 15: Pochi

All he'd ever done was love his master.

In this world, dogs were popular domestic animals. While they lived in packs in the wild, dogs were obedient and loyal as long as they got used to a human. They had a developed sense of smell and, as such, were prized hunting companions.

With enough training, dogs were able to tell different monsters apart based on their smell. They could also sense danger from miles away and bark to warn their master. In this world, where there was no telling when vicious monsters might attack you, dogs were irreplaceable.

Naturally, they were also used in armies. Each platoon had its own dog trained to recognize the smell of different monsters.

Pochi should've been one of these army dogs. He'd started training as a puppy, but unfortunately, he'd underperformed compared to others. When he failed to meet the army's expectations, he was thrown away.

That was cruel, of course, but what else could the army do? The dogs wouldn't just feed themselves. The witch and her monsters would destroy every village and field they could get to. People were dying of starvation every day. There was no food to waste on a useless dog.

(Nowadays, life was easier. Ellize, the saint, had discovered that potatoes and soy—two crops that no one thought much of until then—could grow even on devastated land. The food shortage had been mostly eradicated thanks to her efforts, but before her godsent discovery, people had struggled to survive.)

The bygone harsh days were one of the consequences of the previous saint's failure—the one who'd lived two generations before Ellize. She hadn't been able to slay the witch, plunging the world into a long dark age.

The one who'd saved Pochi after he had been abandoned by the army was Alexia, the saint of that era. She'd always wanted a dog of her own, she'd told

him.

Dias—the head of her guard—had objected, telling her he’d be happy to find her an outstanding dog instead, but Alexia had picked him up with a smile and simply said, “No need, I like this one.”

That was Pochi’s most precious memory...and it hadn’t faded one bit with the years.

He couldn’t forget the warmth of her hand when she gently patted his head.

He remembered every single time she’d picked him up and held him close to her chest.

All he wanted was for her to do that one more time... Just one more time...

Verner and Marie shook hands and congratulated each other on their bravery.

The rest of the students were watching them and applauding energetically, when suddenly, something unexpected happened.

A large shadow covered the two students standing in the middle of the arena.

Before Marie had even noticed that something was wrong, Verner had already grabbed her and jumped out of the way. The next second, a four-meter tall giant had landed where they’d been standing, shattering the arena.

He had the head of a dog, and his body was covered in black fur. He panted heavily, just like a dog right before a walk, his nose twitching as he sniffed the area.

“Where is...the saint? Kill...saint. I...kill... Witch...praise...me,” the monster said, completely ignoring Verner and Marie—whom he had almost killed a few moments prior.

His mind was dead set on finding the saint and, before long, he spotted her.

“Saint... Kill... I...get pets... I...not trash.”

He started tramping toward her, the students in his path scurrying away in fear. The monster didn’t bother with them. His eyes were on Ellize and no one

else.

Verner couldn't let Ellize get hurt. He immediately grabbed his sword, but...it was only a training sword. It was still potentially lethal, mind you—even with dull edges, a sword was still a sword—but it was reckless to attack a monster with such a weapon.

But Verner had no other choice. How could a knight ignore the saint when she was in trouble?

He tried to rush toward the monster, but someone grabbed his sleeve and stopped him in his tracks—Marie.

“Wait... He's most likely an archmonster. We're not strong enough to face him,” she told him.

“An archmonster?” Verner repeated. “Like the ones we studied in class?! The ones the witch creates by having hundreds of monsters slaughter each other?”

“Exactly. We're no match against something like that...”

Even full-fledged knights couldn't fight archmonsters one-on-one. A mere student attempting to fight such a monster would be insane, *especially* with a training sword. Marie was no fool. She knew better than to court death.

While the two of them were talking, the beast was rapidly approaching Ellize. The saint, on the other hand, hadn't moved from her seat. She was simply looking at the wounds that covered his body, then glanced right into his lonely eyes.

“Stop... Don't...look at me...that way! Don't pity me!”

Ellize's eyes were full of compassion. Neither hatred nor fear clouded her gaze.

Somehow, that was even harder for the monster to endure. He flew into a rage and raised his fist, running toward Ellize, but Verner jumped in to stop him.

He struck the beast's face with his sword, but it obviously didn't do much damage. The only thing he'd succeeded in was getting the monster to step back for a moment.

“Don't...bother me!!!” the monster roared, throwing a punch at Verner.

Marie froze his arm before it could reach Verner.

“You’re so reckless... You could have gotten yourself killed,” she sighed.

“Sorry! Thanks for the help!” Verner exclaimed.

After being saved by Marie’s assist, Verner put some distance between himself and the monster and assumed a fighting stance again.

Unfortunately, he still had nothing but a training sword—a brittle toy when faced with a monster like this one—in hand.

Right at that moment, Eterna ran up to his side.

“Eterna! Why did you come here?!”

“Because you’re trying to do something crazy all by yourself, idiot!” she retorted, clutching her favorite weapon—a staff.

Eterna was no close-quarter combat specialist. She preferred to use magic and fight from a distance, which put her at a big disadvantage in tournaments such as this one. Her abilities only shone when there was a vanguard protecting her and buying her enough time to cast her spells.

There were only three of them. That was far from enough to have a shot at beating such a monster.

Right at that moment, arrows started raining down on the weredog and someone simultaneously smacked him in the face with their sword, forcing him to retreat. John and Fiora appeared.

“Don’t try to act cool all on your own!” the former yelled at Verner.

“I’ll fight too! Let’s protect the saint together!” the latter exclaimed, following close behind.

They were both holding training weapons, but that didn’t seem to stop them. That was no excuse. They’d be disgraced as knights if they faltered and hid while the saint was being attacked right in front of them.

Verner and his friends were brave, without a doubt, but they were also incredibly reckless. One wrong move and they’d be dead.

As if to remind them of that fact, the monster stepped forward. Right at that

moment, however, a big rock exploded, sending dozens of small bits of shrapnel flying at the enemy.

“Oh my, you seem to be having a lot of fun here. But I can’t congratulate you for stepping up instead of fleeing. I will be deducting points from your grades accordingly. Still, your courage is commendable, so I’ll let it slide if you attend a few supplementary lessons and promise to behave next time. I dislike barbaric endeavors such as...fighting...but I cannot forgive that beast for attacking my precious saint. I shall help to the best of my meager ability.”

“Mr. Supple!”

While delivering his monologue, Supple Ment had grown roots around the monster’s legs to pin him in place. He smiled, turned his head so a ray of light would hit his glasses and make them sparkle mysteriously, then walked up to Verner and his friends.

“You may use these. They’re makeshift weapons, but they’re still better than training weapons,” he said, handing a longsword to John, a staff to Eterna, and arrows to Fiora.

As for Verner...he’d picked such a large claymore for the tournament that Supple Ment had nothing to replace it with. Still, there were now six of them—enough to put up a fight.

Ellize raised her hand and a sword began to emerge from the ground. She must have used the earth’s different mineral components around the area to craft a sword. And, in ten seconds, the sword was fully ready. Ellize had crafted a weapon just for Verner.

The weredog roared before jumping at Verner.

“Verner! Use it!” Ellize screamed, watching the monster’s fangs draw nearer and nearer to Verner.

He picked up the sword Ellize had gifted him and started slashing at the monster, severing one of his arms in a split second.

Verner was in awe. The sword was light—way too light for it to be made out of metal. And yet, it was sharper than any blade he’d ever used before.

“Thank you, Lady Ellize! I know I can do it now!”

Verner effortlessly swung his sword over his head, as if it weighed absolutely nothing. His form was perfect as he prepared to bring the blade down. His feet were firmly on the ground, anchoring him, and he was holding the sword with both hands, accompanying its movement with his entire upper body.

He made sure the blade was facing up and the sun shone down on it, making it sparkle.

The monster flinched.

Layla was green with envy. Receiving a weapon from the saint was a knight's prerogative. To them, there was no greater honor.

She'd also been bestowed the sword she was using by Ellize on the day she'd officially entered her guard. However, while she'd gotten the honor of receiving a blade from Ellize's hands, the weapon in question had been crafted by a regular smith, not by Ellize herself. It had been nothing more than a ceremony. The sword had been chosen by other people before being given to Ellize, who in turn, had just handed it over to Layla to observe protocol.

Still, she couldn't bring herself to tell Ellize she also wanted a sword crafted just for her. It would've sounded like a child's tantrum.

She stole a glance at Ellize, lost in thought, but the other girl noticed.

“What's wrong, Layla?”

“No... It's nothing.”

Layla was a little disappointed. Sadly, Ellize hadn't understood her feelings without her having to say anything.

Granted, she doubted Ellize had thought it over before bestowing a sword upon Verner. She'd just given him one because he'd had nothing to fight with.

Layla was certain that if she were just to ask, Ellize would make her a sword without question. But she couldn't... She didn't want to sound like a whiny kid.

While she was battling with the feelings inside her head, the fight was still ongoing.

The monster roared, slamming on the floor with his only remaining arm. The ground burst open under Verner and his party's feet.

They jumped back, and Marie got ready to counterattack. She unleashed ice magic from her fingertip, hitting the monster in the chest.

It wasn't enough to stop the weredog, though. He kept moving forward, his enormous mouth wide open. A fireball began to form in the back of his throat.

As soon as she noticed it, Eterna stuck out her wand.

"Light Shield!"

A wall of light appeared in front of Verner and his friends, weakening the fireball. However, Eterna's spell didn't block it completely, and it continued its way toward her.

This time, Supple used earth magic to erect another wall, weakening the fire even further.

Without a moment's delay, Marie followed up with an ice spell, finally extinguishing the fireball. Verner and John made use of this opportunity to dash forward, each striking one of the monster's legs.

Fiora aimed for his face, shooting arrow after arrow, helping them keep the beast in check.

One of his legs having been badly cut open by Verner, the monster let out a whine and fell to his knees. He wasn't going to go down so easily, though. He opened his maw again, blasting out a fireball that destroyed the ground.

The rubble hit Verner and his friends, forcing them to step back. The monster immediately followed up by jumping at them head-first.

His large body blew them away, and they all fell to the ground.

John and Fiora went flying outside of the arena and passed out on the spot. As for Supple, he spun several times in the air before falling down head-first into the seating area. Marie barely managed to remain conscious, but she was unable to get up.

Eterna and Verner were the only two members of the team who hadn't taken too much damage. The former got up and raised her staff toward Verner, using

healing magic on him.

Verner used his sword to prop himself up, getting up with difficulty. As soon as he could, he charged at the monster head-on.

The weredog was already back on his feet and roared again, rushing at Verner too.

Right before the two collided, the last spell Marie had miraculously managed to launch hit the monster in the eyes. He faltered for a second, which decided the outcome of the fight.

Verner's sword went right through the monster's throat and he tumbled down, out of strength. Blood spewed out from the deep gash, and no matter how many times he tried to get back up, he couldn't.

"W-We made it..." Verner whispered, plopping on the ground, breathless.

What a scary opponent, he thought. Even with the six of them joining hands, they had barely managed to grasp victory. And yet, their terrifying foe seemed so pitiful in Verner's eyes now that he was at death's door.

"Witch... I...do my best...for you. I...do better...so...give hugs..."

His eyes—in which you could read intelligent thought—were filled with tears as he called for his master.

Ellize walked up to him slowly.

The dog started bringing his face closer to her, as though he didn't recognize the person he'd tried to kill a few moments ago. He was most likely confusing her with his beloved master, the witch.

Ellize didn't reject him. She reached out and hugged him tenderly. Her arms could only reach his face, but the monster closed his eyes nonetheless, at peace. He looked just like a puppy in his master's embrace.

"Lady Ellize... This monster is..."

"He must have failed to become an archmonster. I'm sure this poor puppy only loved the witch. He must have caused all this trouble because he wanted her to embrace him like this. He didn't know any better. Everything he did was to make the witch happy. He tried his best so she could praise him. How sad..."

The witch didn't return his love, did she?"

The countless wounds on the monster's body seemed to prove Ellize's guess right. No one knew how the witch treated him. Perhaps she'd been the one to inflict these wounds to relieve her stress. Perhaps she hadn't done anything to him herself, but had let other monsters test their powers on him. In either case, there was no doubt he had suffered a great deal of pain under her care.

"Witch..." he called out weakly.

He sounded like a child whining for his mother's attention. He probably had no idea who was hugging him in this state. He was lost in a daze, reliving old memories.

Ellize continued to pet him gently, lulling him to sleep.

"It's all right. You've been such a good boy... You can take a little nap, no one will get mad at you. Good night..."

The weredog let out a little whine, but quieted down.

"Pochi."

He still couldn't forget about her voice.

In his dreams, the dog—Pochi—saw his master as she'd been before she changed.

She sat down and smiled at him just like she used to in the past.

"Come here," she said, extending her hands toward him.

Pochi didn't hesitate for a second and jumped right into her arms.

No matter how much she had changed, he still loved her.

In his dreams, Pochi was back to being the happiest pup in the universe, nestled safely in the arms of the person he loved most in the world.

His body went still.

Ellize patted his head one last time before letting go slowly.

Faced with this sorrowful spectacle, Verner clenched his fists. He had been the one to kill this poor monster. He'd been convinced he was a terrible foe he needed to get rid of.

That was why he knew he had no right to feel this way... But he couldn't help it.

"I'll never forgive her..." he whispered.

"Me neither..." Eterna answered, her voice cracking as if she was about to cry.

This monster had only followed the witch faithfully. His only sin was loving her and wanting her love in return. Even though she'd treated him like worthless trash, even though she'd hurt him, he'd remained loyal to her.

After seeing Pochi's pitiful end and understanding his feelings, Verner and Eterna made up their minds.

"We'll defeat her... We have to. She doesn't deserve anyone's forgiveness..." Verner let out.

They couldn't allow such tragedies to be repeated over and over again. They had to put an end to it. Verner swore he'd defeat the witch before praying silently for the pitiful monster who—he hoped—would now rest in peace.

He believed that Pochi's last moments, at the very least, had given him some solace...

Chapter 16: Between Dreams and Reality

My sight was blurry, and I didn't feel like I was in the real world. If anything, I felt like I was floating inside a big, fluffy cloud.

Yup, I'm in a dream all right.

As I realized this, I looked around the room and noticed that the ever-stupid-looking Fudou Niito in the room was up. He seemed to be heading toward the kitchen even though I hadn't tried to move at all...

What's going on? Can my body move without my control this time? I guess it's a dream, so anything's possible. It'd be even weirder if every single one of my dreams went the exact same way.

I walked up to the computer and tried to turn it on like I always did, but for some reason, I couldn't touch it. My hand went through it.

The hell? This dream is kind of a pain in the ass.

While I was cursing the dream, my body came back from the kitchen.

Oh, great. Perfect timing, me. Turn on the computer, there's stuff I wanna check. Come on, hurry.

I tapped the computer a few times and gestured at it, but Niito—me—simply plopped down on the chair. He looked bored to death as he booted up the computer.

Good, good, looks like he's listening to me. That's the most important thing. Go to that video platform—you know, the one I always check out with the comments?

Comments were often more informative than the videos themselves. I was hoping to learn what people thought about the me in the game.

On the homepage, there were several recommendations—including videos of Ellize's and Layla's routes—but I wanted to see Eterna's.

I had a feeling Verner was kind of straying on the wrong path, and I needed to

set him straight. The ending I wanted to see was Verner/Eterna and nothing else, so I needed to know about the new Eterna route—the one where I was Ellize. I was sure the video would give me useful hints to fix things when I woke up inside the game again.

As it turned out, the Eterna route video showed me scenes that were completely different from the ones I remembered.

First of all, Ellize had done a 180. She still had the same face, but she wasn't a bully anymore. She was a proper saint with a perfect reputation—me.

However, the rest of the events were pretty different from the ones I'd seen as Ellize.

For instance, Farah hadn't kidnapped her at all. Instead, Verner and Eterna had stopped Farah from trying to kill Ellize. During their fight, Eterna had awoken her saintly powers and saved Farah from the witch's brainwashing. While the target of the assassination had changed, the series of events was much closer to the initial Eterna route I'd played in the game.

I assumed the kidnapping hadn't happened because I hadn't visited the academy in this storyline. That, or I *had* gone to the academy, but Verner had been good and raised the heroine's affection level properly without my intervention. After all, Farah had only decided to kidnap Verner because she'd seen me meet with him in private. If I hadn't done that, the story wouldn't have moved in that direction.

I continued watching the video, but Ellize didn't end up transferring to the academy at all. The event where monsters attacked the academy had gone how it was initially supposed to go. Some no-name background characters had died pitifully, but Verner, Eterna, and a few other girls he'd talked to had worked together to resolve the situation.

Needless to say, Eterna hadn't tried to kill herself either.

All in all, most of the events progressed according to the normal game, albeit with a few differences.

Eterna and her friends never tried to prove that Ellize was a fake. The story continued to unfold with everyone believing that she was the real deal.

I watched up until the moment where Ellize was outed in the normal storyline but, naturally, that didn't happen.

The playthrough continued all the way to the fight against the witch but Ellize still hadn't been ousted from her position.

Four-Eyed Pervert didn't stalk Eterna, nor did he abduct her. He'd turned into a strange character that merely looked suspicious, but didn't actually do anything.

The evening before the fight with the witch, the Ellize of this storyline gave up on waiting. She gathered Verner, Eterna, and Layla to tell them the truth. It was followed by another scene where Verner and Eterna discussed Ellize's confession, but their reaction was completely different from what I expected.

"Me, the real saint...? It's so sudden! I don't know what to do, Ver. I'm scared... I can't measure up to Lady Ellize! I'll never be a good saint!"

Eterna wasn't supposed to react like that! She was supposed to go "I have to accomplish my destiny... I'm the saint, after all," and make up her mind to act like a dignified saint.

In the next scene, Ellize was preparing to fight the witch, but the moment she started going down the stairs to the basement, the witch ran away, scared shitless. Mission complete.

No one was able to find the witch again a year after the beginning of the game. The game moved on to the final fight automatically, then to the ending. The player no longer had any choices to make.

Ellize was nearing the end of her life by then, and she could barely move any more.

For real? I thought I had at least a few years left, but it looks like my life span was shortened much more than I expected.

The king was scared of the repercussions that would follow Ellize's death, so he decided to confine her to prevent everyone from learning of her ailment. She wasn't allowed to fight anymore.

As a result, Ellize wasn't even given the possibility to use the last of her

strength to track down the witch and take her down with her.

Comments along the lines of “If only they hadn’t confined her...” and “The king is a freaking dumbass!” flooded my screen.

The protagonists ended up having to face the witch in the final flight without Ellize. Just like in the original story, Eterna had to give up her life to take down the witch. She passed away in Verner’s arms right after the witch.

WHAT?! Why am I just sleeping instead of doing something about this?! How useless can I get? This is literally the one ending I wanted to avoid!!!

If only Ellize hadn’t been confined to her room...

It wouldn’t have changed anything. The witch would’ve teleported the second she felt Ellize approach.

The witch keeps running away from Lady El in every route.

If Ellize had gotten her hands on her everything would’ve been different tho...

All right, so... The witch runs away from me. Let’s remember that. The time I had left to live was much shorter than I’d expected, so I needed to keep that in mind too. I should assume that I’ll die on the three-hundred sixty-fifth day after the start of the game.

Anyway, the witch had used teleportation... That was her very last resort because it weakened her a great deal.

In the world of *Kuon no Sanka*, teleporting meant taking your own body apart. You had to break it down into fine particles that could travel in an instant before putting it back together. Even the witch would risk dying in the process. The skill was the main reason why the witch wasn’t as powerful in every run. If she’d had to teleport, she’d be weaker in the final fight.

So why the heck did she teleport without even trying to fight me? Do I scare her that much? Whatever. I can stop watching videos of Eterna’s route. I got it.

Even though I’d been placed in Ellize’s shoes instead of the original, Eterna’s

route wouldn't change. Which meant that I couldn't continue to aim for that ending, could I?!

Maybe there was still some hope for her ending... What I'd experienced so far had ended up being pretty different from the content of this video. Since I'd been in the academy the whole time, and I'd just gained knowledge of the future, there had to be a way for me to fix things for her.

Hey, Niito—uh, me—can you show me a playthrough of Ellize's route now? Fast forward to Ellize entering the academy... Yep, perfect.

This video, on the other hand, showed the events just as I'd seen them.

The standard characters that appeared in this route were different from others. Random dude and Fiora didn't even exist in other routes, and Four-eyed Pervert usually never hung out with Verner and his group.

Ellize had been present during the whole monsters-raiding-the-academy mess and she'd managed to get everything under control almost instantly. Eterna then ran away and tried to kill herself by jumping off the cliff, and Ellize and Verner jumped after her.

And then—yep, exactly as I remembered it—Verner saw my cut. Just like I had, Ellize had made up an excuse about a piece of thread.

I looked at the comments and finally realized—a bit late, sure—that I'd messed up.

A piece of thread?

Lady Ellize... You do know that nobody's wearing red, right?

Hang on! Maybe her panties are red.

I'm sure it's from Verner's underwear.

That'd be funny. The red thread of fate between me and Ellize...right from my underwear.

Mine too.

You two can just connect your red threads, then.
Congrats.

Damn, I imagined it. Gross lol

Wanna connect with me lmao?

Crap. I'd had to say something fast in the heat of the moment, and the first thing that came to mind had been the whole thread thing, but... There hadn't been any red fabric around us back then. None at all.

Verner's uniform was black and blue. Mine and Eterna's were white and green.

I messed up. Oh boy, did I mess up.

Thankfully, while the guys in the comments had noticed immediately, Verner hadn't seemed to notice anything wrong with what Ellize had told him. Guess that was a win, then.

After that, the summer holiday started and it was time for the date events.

I continued watching the video. One evening, Ellize's face popped on the minimap. The player clicked on her and sent Verner to her location—the academy.

The event started. Verner was walking in the school building and he spotted Ellize. She seemed to be trying to be discreet and looked left and right before each step.

Wait... That's... Was that a date event?

Verner and Ellize's conversation went exactly as it had last time. They failed to distract Layla and got an earful. In the end, Ellize said goodbye to Verner, but it was different than usual.

See you tomorrow, Verner!♪

HUH?!

THE HELL?! DID I SOUND LIKE THAT?! I didn't. No way. Who even is that?!

Sure, I'd said those exact words, but...my tone had been different, right? I knew it had. I was convinced I'd spoken to him like any guy would with a friend. Or at least, that was what I'd intended.

Idk how many times I've listened to this line

I replayed the event at least 20 times to hear it. No, I'm not addicted.

She sounds so mischievous! Too cuuuuuute!!!

Lady Ellize is so adorable. I love how she's super happy that she made a friend.

Cute...

She's so precious.

Aaah, she looks so happy!!!

What happens if you renamed your MC?

>Then there's no voice line, you only get the text.

I couldn't take it anymore; I covered the comment section with my hand.

So that was how it'd ended up sounding from the outside...

What a disaster! I wanted to nuke the whole area, crawl into a hole, and die.

Anyway, the video moved on to the martial tournament. Verner struggled against Marie, but eventually won. Then the small fry entered the fight.

Ellize made a sword for Verner, so the player immediately went into his inventory to equip it. Its specs were— Wait! What the hell?! I'd casually slapped something together so he'd at least have a decent weapon to use, but I never expected it to have such high stats!

It was called the "Saint's Great Sword," and it raised the wielder's attack as much as the strongest end-game weapon did. On top of that, two-handed swords usually came with an accuracy and speed penalty, but this one had

almost none.

STR0000000000NG!!!

It's way too good for a sword you get at this point...

RIP the game's balance

You can only do Lady El's route once so you definitely need all the help you can get.

What happens if you use another type of weapon?

>It's still called the "Saint's ____" but it'll turn into whatever weapon you picked for the tournament. I dual wielded and got a pair of incredible one-handed swords.

>I got a longsword.

>I got a tonfa.

>I got nothing...

>>lmao did you fight Marie barehanded? You get no weapon then, deal w/it

>>Seriously...

>I played with the daikon radish for the lols and she gave me the Saint's Daikon Blade lmao. It was super strong too.

>I equipped a mackerel and she gave me the Saint's Mackerel.

>>Lady El's so good at crafting weapons lmao

It seemed like Ellize would make something suitable for Verner regardless of what he used.

It's impossible to win with a training weapon, so I guess that makes sense.

It wasn't all that difficult for me to craft weapons... As long as it wasn't

anything too weird, that is.

And yeah, fair enough. I guess I wouldn't have made him anything if he just fought barehanded to begin with...

The big doggo died after the fight, as expected, but...for some reason, a heart-wrenching BGM started playing as Ellize hugged his head.

Oh, that's a CG. What a nice picture. Is that what it looked like from the outside?

While I was thinking about that, I suddenly heard someone speak.

“I bet all you could think of during that scene was something like, ‘what a pain, can you hurry up and fall asleep so we can call it a day?’ The CG’s making you seem like the perfect heroine, though. What a *joke*.”

The one who’d just said that was...me?

Fudou Niito—me—had started talking...to me?

He turned toward me and smirked.

What the hell's going on?! Can my body do things regardless of my will? No wait, isn't that how dreams always work? You never truly control them, do you?

He cleared his throat. “Can’t you do something about the way you talk? Usually you’re all polite, and it’s kinda weird to hear you speak like me with that face.”

What the fuck is he on about? I only do that because I have to pretend to be the saint. There's no reason for me to go out of my way to speak like a proper lady in my dreams. I'm not Ellize right now.

“I get it now. You have no idea, do you? Hang on,” he said, getting up. “Where did I put my mirror again?”

He started rummaging through the room.

Are you an idiot or what? The mirror's in the desk's drawer, always has been.

“Oh, right,” he said, taking it out and angling it toward me. “Take a look at yourself.”

Ellize’s face stared back at me. She was translucent, just like a ghost.

What...the hell?!

“WHAAAT?! I was so sure I was back to looking like myself in my dreams! Why do I still have Ellize’s face?!” I screamed, shocked.

That was when I noticed. The voice that had just come out of my mouth was one I had gotten used to hearing—a clear, melodious feminine voice.

Niito—me—smiled triumphantly at the look of astonishment on my face.

“How did you manage not to notice? Are you dumb or what? Just so you know, it was exactly the same the past few times you were here. You did take over my body but you still looked like that when you arrived.”

“F-For real?”

“Yeah, duh. When did you start deluding yourself into thinking that you were Fudou Niito?”

“Oh, stop trying to sound cool,” I shot back. “Just so you know, you still sound like a dumbass.”

This dream’s so strange. I never expected me to start making fun of myself.

“Let’s assume you’re right. Who the hell am I, then? What, I’m the real Ellize but I happened to reincarnate with your memories? Is that it?” I asked.

“Nah, that wouldn’t make any sense. There’d be no way for you to come and go as you please. You’d be stuck in that world with only the memories if that were the case. We’re connected somehow. It’s not just our memories, I think we—”

While Niito—me—was speaking, my vision started blurring at breakneck speed.

Uh-oh. I knew that feeling. It meant I was gonna wake up soon. Niito—me—seemed to notice as well.

“Whatever! We don’t have time, so listen up! You seem to think this is a dream. Well, it is and it isn’t. The fact that you’re able to bring the memories you obtain here into your world is crucial. Don’t just brush it off as a dream—remember everything you see and hear here! You got it? If you approach the witch, she’ll run away! She’ll keep hiding until you die, so you can’t go to the

basement! She's still in the academy because she doesn't think you know her exact location. The moment you show her that you do, she'll flee without hesitating, and you won't be able to find her again! I've seen that route play out, so what you need to do is—"

Niito—me—was still speaking, but I was unable to hear the rest.

AAARGH, I WANNA KNOW!

Sadly, I didn't get a choice in the matter. I woke up in the luxurious bed I'd gotten used to.

Man, now *that* was weird.

I'd just had a talk with myself, and he'd told me some confusing stuff. Apparently, my dreams were dreams...but they also weren't? That didn't make any sense. Dreams were dreams; that's all there was to them.

As much as I wished I could've just written the whole thing off entirely, I figured remembering that bit about the witch might prove useful in the future.

If what I'd learned in my dream was true, the witch would flee as soon as she knew I was coming for her. She would use teleportation regardless of the side effects and conceal her whereabouts.

Yeah, that would suck.

The only reason I knew where the witch was hiding was because I'd seen it in the game. I didn't have some special tracking ability or anything like that. If she ran away, I wouldn't have a way to find her. She could very well cross the ocean and hide on the neighboring continent for all I knew! There was a large forest there, and I had a feeling that I could spend years looking for her to no avail.

It wasn't completely impossible to track dark magic in this world, so that might be a solution. Four-Eyed Pervert had done it to find Eterna last time. However, I'd only learned to bulldoze my way through mobs galore by spamming magic everywhere. I didn't know any sneaky spells like his. I couldn't ask Four-Eyed Pervert to do it for me either—I was pretty sure he could only track people if they were fairly close to him.

Either way, it was much safer to avoid spooking the witch.

Discretion is the better part of valor, and it looked like the witch was well aware of that. She knew to avoid engaging in a fight she couldn't win. She wouldn't even let me get close to her. Sure, that made her kind of a wuss, but she was smart. That was how you won wars.

Still, what kind of final boss runs away, huh?

At the moment she was (most likely) still in the basement of the academy.

Besides the fact that teleportation was a risky spell, there were merits to staying there. The academy was the place where future knights gathered to learn, so hiding there would allow her to quickly learn about individuals who posed a possible threat to her in the future. On top of that, this place was a mine of information.

She could count on the headmaster, a few teachers, and several students—all of whom she'd planted in the academy—to spy for her.

Without them, she'd have no way to know exactly when I'd come for her.

There had to be *someone* close to me who watched my movement and reported to the witch... Most likely someone in my guard.

Layla? ...No, impossible. She wasn't that shrewd.

While Layla *had* betrayed the original Ellize in the game, she was still proud of hailing from a noble family that had always stood by the saint's side. As far as she was concerned, she'd never betrayed the saint. No, she'd betrayed *Ellize*, the traitor who'd deceived her. She later devoted herself to the one who should've been her true master all along: Eterna.

Another guard who might've disliked me was Viscount Fox, Aina's beloved daddy. In the game, his family had fallen—in fact, most of them even committed suicide—all because he'd dared to tell Ellize she was going too far. *Poor man.*

He used to be the head of my guard before Layla took over, but he'd taken care of me a lot when I was younger. He didn't really have any reason to hate me in this world, though, and he wasn't even at the academy. Layla was the only member of my guard who'd followed me here.

That made Viscount Fox a very unlikely suspect, which meant...it had to be either a student or a teacher. I had no way of knowing their identity, then.

I couldn't remember most of the random named characters that barely appeared. It'd be a major pain to look through all of these extras to find the spy.

Urgh... I have no idea who it could be. Well, whatever. Let's put that on the back burner and avoid the basement for the time being.

The next time I had one of those dreams, I'd check on the internet for more info.

I had a lot of time before the game ended, so there was no reason to hurry. I knew that I'd die at around the same time Verner and the others would finish their first year at the academy. Conversely, I also knew for sure that I'd at least hold out that long.

Yeah, there was no need to rush.

With that all sorted out in my mind, it was time to get ready.

I stood in front of the mirror and used my usual spells to make my hair and skin as perfect as ever. I had to always make sure my appearance was beautiful enough to conceal the terrible piece of shit I was deep inside.

Well, you know how the saying went—you couldn't polish a turd. Even a gold-plated piece of shit still stunk.

As an Ainu girl once said, you shouldn't eat poop, no matter what.

Anyway, I was currently in class.

Whenever I was around other students, I made sure to keep on the most radiant smile at all times. It was impossible to keep your mouth in that shape forever—if you tried to do it normally, that is. I relied on magic for this as well. I used thunder magic to send electrical signals to my facial muscles and switched between a few natural expressions I'd rehearsed beforehand.

If I didn't do that, I tended to revert to my natural resting bitch face fairly quickly.

As always, my performative smile was on point. Conceal, don't feel—that was my motto.

“...and as such, you should always keep that in mind when fighting sorries. I cannot warn you enough, do *not* stand in front of a sorry bowing to you. It may look like a sign of capitulation at first glance, but this posture is in fact a subterfuge that will...”

I was barely listening to the lecture as I tried to summarize the upcoming events in my head.

The time period between the first martial tournament and the winter holiday was the middle phase of the game. Most of it was actually dedicated to Ellize’s story arc—you know, her getting outed as the fake and all that. That made Ellize the main enemy during this part of the game, not the witch.

After Verner put his life on the line to save her during the martial tournament, Ellize took a liking to him and barged into the academy. She followed Verner around everywhere and got jealous of whichever heroine hung out with him the most at that point in time. She resolved to bully her until she gave up on her man, going as far as to order her underlings to assault the poor girl. She even hired hit men!

The game was PG, so the rape attempts all failed, but Verner’s hatred—as well as the players’—toward Ellize kept intensifying.

That was when Aina stepped in with her botched assassination attempt. As I’d said in the past, she’d failed in killing Ellize, but still succeeded in hurting her, which had cast doubt on her identity.

At the same time, Verner and his friends had created a list of Ellize’s evil deeds, and Layla had finally made up her mind and betrayed her ward. She’d joined Verner and gave him all the information she’d gathered over the years. Ellize was finally convicted and cast away, disgraced.

This all happened a little earlier during Eterna’s route, since she realized that she was the true saint and awakened her powers during the Farah event.

Anyway, after all that happened, a fight between Ellize and the main character’s party occurred. While the former was a genius, she hadn’t lifted a finger a day in her life and was unable to use her potential. She lost miserably and fled the academy. In the end, she hid away in a poor village, living off scavenging rubbish for scraps of food...that is, until she was found by a group of

people who'd sworn to take revenge on her. They killed her and tore her body apart until nothing remained.

I hadn't done anything worthy of being hated, so I didn't think the story would progress that way. Hopefully, this part of the game would be a peaceful, uneventful, cozy time.

I'd seen the Eterna route in my dream, and no one had known I was a fake until the end. Unless I messed up real bad, it would probably stay that way.

To be fair, even since my blunder—letting Verner see my cut—I made sure to protect my body with magic 24-7. Even if Aina tried to kill me, I was all set.

Anyway! To sum things up, I could enjoy myself and take it easy until the winter holiday. I was the main source of trouble during the middle phase, so as long as I stayed put, everything would be all right.

There were also a few events related to each of the heroines during this part of the game, but, well... Since Verner was a stupid bodybuilder in this world, I didn't expect much.

At the very least, Marie had started hanging out with him after the martial tournament. Although I had a feeling they saw each other as rivals, rather than love interests. I doubted Marie's event would occur at all.

Hm...

Man, I'm so bored.

Maybe I should go bully the headmaster a little to pass the time? I already know he's a spy anyway. If I beat him up and force him to tell me everything he knows, I bet I'll be able to uncover the other spies. I can't attack him without any evidence, though. That would hurt my image. It'd be great if I could find some proof... But I'm sure he's not stupid enough to leave incriminating evidence all over the place.

In that case, the best course of action would be to catch him in the act. I had a feeling it wouldn't be easy, though...

I dunno what to dooooo! Can't someone just give me a hint?

Chapter 17: Troublemakers

Verner had grown a lot after the martial tournament, but he refused to rest on his laurels; he continued to diligently train every day.

He'd gained a lot during the tournament: experience fighting a powerful monster, a sword crafted by Ellize just for him, the resolve never to forgive the witch, and—most importantly—a new comrade.

Marie, whom he had faced during the finals, had become his friend and rival. They strove to better themselves together.

He now had a rival that was at around the same skill level, and he could spar with her whenever he wanted. This was helping Verner become stronger faster than ever before.

It reminded him of what Ellize had told him a while ago—there were limits to what someone could do alone. He finally felt like he understood the true meaning behind her words.

Besides Marie, he had Eterna, John, and Fiora by his side. And—although not a student—he knew he could count on Mr. Supple in times of crisis.

They all had their strengths and weaknesses, but they could help each other overcome their shortcomings. None of them could hold a candle to the saint—not on their own, at least. But if they joined hands, Verner was sure they would never lose to anyone.

Verner felt like he was at the top of the world and was enjoying every single day to the utmost.

One day, after class, he was sparring with John and Marie on the sports ground behind the school when he noticed that Marie was stealing glances at a student a little further away.

Marie almost never showed her emotions on her face, but Verner knew that deep down, she was a kind person. However, on that particular day, Verner noticed something off about her expression.

“What’s wrong Marie? Is there something weighing on your mind?”

“Well... That girl over there...” she said, glancing in the direction of the red-haired girl swinging her sword again and again in the distance.

Verner remembered her—she’d lost to Marie in the semifinals.

“That’s Aina, right? What’s up with her?”

“She hates me. She always glares at me whenever she sees me.”

If memory served Verner right, she had also refused to shake hands with Marie after her defeat.

He didn’t think that was a good attitude to have. He didn’t know Aina all that well, but it was plain as day that she was incredibly prideful.

She must have felt a sense of rivalry toward Marie ever since the tournament.

“It’s not your fault, Marie. I get that she’s frustrated since she lost, but hating you for it is completely absurd,” John reassured her.

“He’s right! Don’t let it get to you,” Fiora added.

Marie had won their match fair and square. She was stronger than Aina, that’s all there was to it. There was no reason for her to be ashamed of that.

“I agree that you shouldn’t let it get to you, but it can’t feel good to have her glare at you like you did something awful every time you cross paths,” Eterna said.

Verner nodded. “Eterna has a point.”

Even if Marie wasn’t at fault at all, it wasn’t easy to ignore someone’s constant hostility.

But if the group were to try to talk to Aina, it would most likely backfire. She was way too prideful to listen to them. Even if they tried to bring it up to her gently with sound arguments, it would most likely just add fuel to the fire.

“Hmm? Hey, guys, that’s the headmaster, right?” Fiora suddenly asked.

For some reason, the headmaster had walked up to Aina. They chatted for a while, then headed off together. Verner and his friends were left wondering what had happened.

“Do you think he has something to tell her about her grades?” Eterna asked.

“Why would the headmaster himself bother with that?” John pointed out.

Even if they were curious, it wasn’t something worth investigating. A teacher talking to a student wasn’t anything outlandish in the first place.

Just as they decided to stop thinking about it, another person butted in.

“How strange... It’s not often the headmaster goes out of his way to discuss something with a student himself.”

They all turned back together to find Supple, digging into the ground with a shovel. The five students couldn’t stop themselves from wondering how he could point out that something was odd when he clearly was the weirdest person out there.

Supple didn’t seem to notice the way they looked at him as he dug out a piece of soil. He hardened it with magic before neatly putting it away in a bag.

“I would have understood if he’d decided to congratulate Verner for his victory, but what could he have to say to Aina Fox? She’s a promising student, of course, but I would expect him to talk to one of you before her. She’s not a blood relative of his, and their families have no ties either... How puzzling,” he continued.

“Hmm... Mr. Supple... What are you doing?”

“Me? There was a footprint left by none other than our glorious saint. I had to preserve it before a foolish individual stepped over it and destroyed it!”

The students were all speechless. *That pervert’s a lost cause*, they thought in unison.

As students who hoped to become knights in the future, they wondered if they should kill him on the spot. He was a greater threat than even the witch as far as they were concerned.

Completely oblivious to the looks of disgust he was receiving, Supple added, “The headmaster has been really strange recently. His actions are unsettling, to say the least.”

You’re one to talk!

“For some reason, he ordered the night guards to stop coming to the academy and picked up their shifts instead. He refuses to let the maids clean his office, and he’s added five more locks to the door...not to mention the fact that he changed the windows to more robust, barred ones. No one can look inside now. Doesn’t it seem like he’s hiding something people shouldn’t see?”

For real, you’re one to talk! The five students stared at the bag Supple was still holding. As far as they were concerned, that *very much* qualified as “something people shouldn’t see.”

“Is it really that strange? I also wouldn’t want people snooping in my room...” Verner pointed out.

“You’re not wrong. His behavior is a little unsettling, but at the end of the day, none of what he’s doing is reprehensible. You could explain away his actions by saying he just felt like it. It happens sometimes, does it not? Someone who’s never been seen kicking a rock suddenly decides to do so. If I asked why and they said they felt like it, I suppose I wouldn’t question it anymore. Still, if they started kicking rocks every single day, I would suspect something had happened. That’s how I feel about the headmaster. I can’t quite put it into words, but I can feel that something has happened. He’s changed.”

While he explained his theory, Supple carefully closed the small bag and put it in his inside pocket like it was the greatest treasure he owned. One thing was certain, at least—Supple’s actions could not be explained away by saying he just “felt like it.”

“Now, now... Shall we tail him for a while? We may discover something interesting,” Supple suggested. With that, he ran in the direction the headmaster and Aina had gone in without another moment of delay. He seemed quite serious in his intent on tailing him.

As for the students, they were left wondering what they ought to do about Supple. He had to be stopped before they could turn their attention to the headmaster.



Aina Fox had always loved and admired her father. She couldn’t have been more proud of him.

Seventeen years ago, she had been lucky enough to be born as his daughter.

House Fox was not a very prominent noble family—her father was merely a viscount, after all. They ruled over a small territory comprised mostly of villages, and—while they had enough wealth to want for nothing—they were poorer than most other nobles.

Aina had never been unhappy about that, though. Being a daughter of House Fox filled her heart with more pride than anyone could ever imagine, and it was all thanks to her outstanding father.

Even though he was only a viscount, he had gained the respect of every other noble family. As an accomplished magic knight, skilled in both swordplay and magic, he had been trusted with the important mission of keeping the saint—humanity's only hope—safe. Only twenty or so people were deemed worthy of joining the prestigious saint's guard, and her father was remarkable enough to have become the leader of such an elite group.

He was the closest ally of the saint, and was always ready to become her shield and sword if the situation called for it. In addition, he was an exemplary knight, and those who devoted their lives to serving the saint on the battlefield all respected and admired him more than anyone else. Most of all, however, he was a champion of justice.

He had become even more respected for protecting humanity's only hope now that Ellize had grown into a fine lady. In fact, she was revered as the greatest saint in history.

Every time she triumphantly returned after saving yet another village from monsters, Aina's father was by her side, and everyone praised him.

Ever since she was a little kid, Aina was convinced that her father was cooler and stronger than any fairy tale hero. He was a fearless guardian who would always protect the princess from harm, and Aina loved him with all her heart.

However, a little over a year ago, her pride had been crushed.

At the time, Layla Scott, a fresh graduate of the academy, had participated in the annual bout that decided the hierarchy within the saint's guard for the first time...and her father had lost to that little nineteen-year-old girl.

He'd handed over his position to Layla and had been relegated to number two.

Aina, who had been given special permission to come to watch the matches with her family, had been shocked by the outcome of the fight.

It *had* to be a lie. Her father must have felt sick that day; there was no other explanation.

The person in question had rejoiced; someone stronger than him would certainly do a better job at protecting their precious saint. But Aina hadn't been able to accept it. She had sworn to win back the honor her family had lost that day.

Fortunately, she'd been learning how to fight from her father ever since she was a child. She had easily passed the entrance exam and was utterly convinced that none of her classmates could ever come close to her level. She wouldn't lose to anybody.

In Aina's eyes, the Training Institute for Magic Knights of Alfrea was nothing more than a stepping stone. Graduating at the top of her class would be easy; the true challenge would come after that. She needed to defeat Layla Scott and reclaim the position of head of the guard her father had lost.

That was the only way she could restore her family's honor.

She was sure she'd come out on top at both tournaments. Victory for the first one seemed a given. It only seemed natural to her, since she strongly believed that she was stronger than anyone there, including the upperclassmen.

She was her father's successor, and her responsibilities were much heavier than those of the others.

And yet, she had failed at the very first martial tournament—the one where she only had to face fellow first-year students.

"Everyone is so hardworking. How nice. Layla, what do you think of this year's tournament?"

"You're asking for my opinion? There are quite a few impressive students this year. I can't get too complacent or they'll catch up to me in no time."

Aina had overheard a conversation between the saint and her sworn enemy, Layla Scott. Well, rather than *overhearing* their conversation, it would be more accurate to say she'd gotten close enough to listen in on them.

"Verner, Aina Fox, John, and Marie Jett, in particular, are diamonds in the rough. Verner still lacks technique, but his foundation is remarkable. Aina Fox doesn't use flashy moves, but she's put in the work. Her basics are well-polished. I wouldn't expect anything else from a descendant of the Fox family, naturally. As for John...he served as a soldier, didn't he? His experience shines through, and he has a good mindset when it comes to combat."

Aina couldn't help but smile at Layla's words. Her sworn enemy had a pretty good eye, didn't she?

Exactly! I'm not my father's daughter for nothing! I'm miles ahead of these weaklings!

She didn't like the fact that Layla had implied that she wasn't flashy enough, but she'd let it slide—the other girl had complimented her more than the other two.

Her good mood dissipated just as quickly as it had arrived when she heard Layla's next words, though.

"Finally, Marie Jett is quite proficient both in swordplay and magic. Her technique is already on par with most knights, even though she doesn't have the strength to match it yet. She's a strong contender this year. To be honest, I think she might win."

What was *wrong* with her?! Why was she saying that Marie—or whatever her name was—was stronger than her?

Actually, it wasn't the first time Aina had heard about Marie Jett. She was a plain girl, kind of gloomy even. Aina could never tell what she was thinking.

Although Aina saw her in a better light now that she'd seen her fight—she also thought the girl was pretty strong—Marie wasn't fit to be a knight at all. Aina simply couldn't forgive her for receiving such glowing praise from her very own rival!

There was an easy fix to this. She just had to crush her and show Layla just

how superior she was.

I won't lose to her!

She'd stepped onto the arena with the utmost confidence, but she'd bit the dust in a matter of minutes. Despite her confidence—she'd always been so sure that she'd never lose any of the martial tournaments—she'd been eliminated during the first tournament's semifinals...by someone of the same year, no less.

She hadn't won. She hadn't even managed to reach the stage where she could have fought for first place or—to add insult to injury—snatch second place.

She slapped Marie's hand away and ran away.

She was a failure, and tears of dejection started running down her cheeks.

What happened next made her even more miserable.

In the next match, Marie lost to a boy called Verner. Right as their fight ended, a gigantic monster barged into the school, disrupting the tournament.

Six people—five students and a teacher—stood up to that horrible monster who'd come to kill the saint: Verner, the winner of the tournament; Marie, the runner-up; John, who'd also finished in the top four; Eterna and Fiora, friends of the final four; and Mr. Supple.

The fight had been close, but they'd managed to bring down the monster. Everyone had acknowledged their bravery. But Aina hadn't been among them.

They weren't knights yet, but they hadn't hesitated to stand up for the saint. They were praised for it; even Lady Ellize had thanked them. They were heroes. But Aina hadn't been among them.

She was the only one among the four students who had reached the semifinals who hadn't stepped up.

"Hey, look—that's Aina. She was in the top four, right?"

"Ah, right. She's the only one who didn't do anything when the monster appeared."

"The other three were amazing, though!"

“To think she’s the daughter of Viscount Fox... What a shame...”

“And she always acts like she’s above everyone.”

“I wonder what she was doing when the monster came.”

“I know! I ran away because I was scar—uh, I mean, I went to the toilet, and I saw her. She was hiding in a classroom.”

“So she really ran away?! Seriously?! Viscount Fox’s daughter ran away!”

“I guess that’s how she truly is.”

“She was kinda mean to Marie after losing too, wasn’t she?”

“She’s all talk. People like her always fail to deliver when push comes to shove.”

After that day, the way people treated her changed. Other students—who hadn’t done anything but hide—spoke ill of her behind her back.

Aina usually looked down on the people around her, that much was true. That attitude of hers was probably part of the reason why everyone hated her now.

I’m not like you guys. I’m the daughter of the head of the saint’s guard!

She had never said anything like that herself, but everyone knew. Even if she hadn’t told them that she looked down on them to their faces, her behavior spoke volumes.

Aina was a very honest girl but, at the same time, she had no consideration for others and no delicacy. She had plenty of enemies because of that.

Up until now, she had always managed to keep them in check with her outstanding talent. No one dared speak ill of an excellent student like her. Sadly for her, the tournament had destroyed her image.

It wasn’t right! Aina wanted to scream to the world that they were all mistaken.

Had she been there, she would’ve fought. She would’ve made a difference. She would’ve stood up to the monster alone and protected the saint. She *knew* she was capable of that.

What had happened was just the result of her bad luck. It was all a

coincidence. It wasn't her fault the monster had appeared when she wasn't there anymore!

But no matter what she thought or said, she couldn't change the cold, hard facts. She hadn't actually done anything. Rumors didn't care about her feelings. Aina was the coward who hadn't stepped up in a time of need.

Ever since that day, Aina had been nothing more than a shell of her former self. She simply carried on with her training without ever talking to anyone. Regardless of who was around her, she was convinced that they looked at her with contempt. She had a feeling that if she stopped training for a second, stopped busying herself, she'd lose herself to her resentment.

She hated Marie the most. Everything had gone rapidly downhill after she'd lost to her. If she stopped devoting herself to her training, she felt like she might run up to her and raise hell.

It's all your fault. If only you didn't exist...

She wouldn't be able to stop herself from blaming it all on her.

That's why she immersed herself in training.

She had run away after losing to Marie, and now she was running away from facing her.

"You've suffered a terrible injustice. I understand your pain."

The only person who walked up to Aina and started a discussion after she'd decided to run away from everything was the headmaster.

He was almost fifty, but he was still muscular and carried himself with dignity. In this world, where the life expectancy of men was barely sixty, he was already elderly enough to be called an old man. Surprisingly, however, he was full of so much energy that he appeared much younger in spite of his gray hair.

His hair was swept back, and his eyes pierced through his interlocutor like those of a carnivorous beast. He was one meter and eighty-eight centimeters tall—much taller than the average of one meter and sixty-five centimeters.

"Luck is fickle and cruel, is it not? You're a gifted individual, and you may very

well have become the next head of the saint's guard. Yet here you are, being mocked for one defeat. One *little* defeat that only occurred because you weren't feeling your best. How unfortunate. I know you would have protected the saint without hesitation if you'd been there when the monster attacked."

These words were everything Aina had wanted to hear. She was heartbroken, and his sweet words had slipped right into the cracks.

"It's regrettable that I could only watch you despair from afar without stepping in. I've always believed that you would become a magnificent knight, you know? I cannot bear to see your talent disappear now; it would be a terrible loss for mankind. And...keep this between the two of us for now, since it hasn't been confirmed yet, but...we're suspecting Marie of foul play. Didn't you feel strangely cold before your match started? You did, right? I think Marie started attacking you before the match had even started. That's why your body felt heavier than usual, and you couldn't unleash your true potential."

Spoilers: that was a lie.

If Marie *had* truly impacted her physical condition so badly, Aina would have definitely noticed. If she had been as cold as he suggested, she would've remembered it. Naturally, Aina didn't remember feeling strange in the slightest.

However, humans were creatures that changed their way of thinking to suit their agenda. Memories were even easier to adjust.

Thinking back on it, maybe she *had* felt cold.

It didn't take long for Aina to convince herself that it had indeed happened. Her imagination and reality merged and, before long, replaced one another in her mind.

Whenever they did something wrong, there were plenty of people who convinced themselves that they'd only done so because the other person was also in the wrong. That feeling quickly turned into thinking that maybe what they'd done hadn't been so bad, after all. This would continue until, eventually, they concluded that it was all the other person's fault. They'd then play the victim and wonder why people were criticizing them when they were perfectly innocent.

“You were very cold, right? You just didn’t notice at the time. It’s not your fault. It’s because Marie tricked you.”

The headmaster’s words kept replaying in Aina’s head. It was almost like she was being brainwashed.

I see now... So that’s what happened. There’s no way I would’ve lost to Marie fair and square. I only lost because she cheated...

Now that she had (mis)understood everything, she was boiling with rage. It wasn’t fair. She’d never forgive her... Never!

The headmaster sensed that the timing was right. He looked into her eyes and noticed that she had completely lost her ability to think.

“You’re the most outstanding student in our school, so I’ll tell you an important secret—the witch has planted spies in this academy.”

“What?!”

“I’ve been fighting alone and looking for someone I could trust for the longest time. I have no idea who the enemy could be, you see. But I have a feeling I can put my trust in you, Aina. To be honest, I think you’ve been put into this situation because the witch has deemed you to be a threat.”

Aina was at a loss for words. Spies? In the academy? But at the same time, she also felt a dark and shameful sense of satisfaction. The headmaster had chosen to come to *her* for such an important talk. He hadn’t sought Marie, but *her*.

“I’m sure you noticed something was wrong too. The timing in which the monster appeared was so perfect that everything just felt like an orchestrated play to me. I’m sure the witch has gathered many allies in the academy already. I cannot *begin* to imagine how many of them are lurking in the darkness, waiting for the opportunity to attack our precious saint. To think she came here, unaware of such dangers...”

“That’s not good! We need to let her know at onc—”

“No, we cannot. If we go to her without proof, she might suspect us instead. We must grasp this chance instead. We can allow the witch to believe no one

has noticed her evil plan, then catch her when she least expects it.” The headmaster leaned in, peered right into Aina’s eyes, and grabbed her hand. “Aina Fox... Please lend me your strength. Let’s protect the saint together.”

“O-Of course! If you think I’m qualified, I’ll do everything I can!”

“That’s a good answer. I’m glad I chose you... I need you to continue pretending that everything is fine. Live your life as usual, but keep an eye on the saint and report everything she does to me. I want you to pay special attention to the times when she acts alone, away from other students. I’m sure you’ve heard of what happened with Miss Farah a few months ago. If the saint looks like she’s sneaking off somewhere alone discreetly, it might be because she’s being threatened by the witch’s servants, just like then. She’ll be in danger, so I need you to let me know immediately. That way I can go rescue her, all right?”

The headmaster’s honeyed words hit the mark, and Aina fell right into his trap.

It was hard to question someone that expressed how much they trusted you. Especially for a young girl who was going through one of the hardest times in her life. Aina’s personality may have played a part in it as well, but she was already fully convinced by everything the headmaster had told her.

“Let me give you something that will come in handy when you need to reach me. This little fellow understands human speech perfectly well, and he’s able to repeat anything he hears. This species has a lot of natural predators, so they’ve developed the ability to blend into their surroundings. This means that even if you carry him on your shoulder all day, no one will notice. Just tell him what you need to report and send him my way. I trained him so he’d come flying to me at once. He’ll relay your message,” he explained.

With that, the headmaster handed Aina a small bird. He seemed to be used to people, because he didn’t resist when Aina picked him up and let him rest on her hand. A few seconds later, he had camouflaged against Aina’s skin tone. She could barely see him anymore.

“Try saying something to him,” the headmaster urged.

“Hmm... Then... Hello?” she said.

The bird bent his head slightly to the side and opened his beak.

“Hmm... Then... Hello?” he repeated.

“Wow! He’s so cute!”

“Wow! He’s so cute!” the bird echoed once again.

Aina was delighted. She scratched his head with her fingertip and found that he was soft to the touch.

“Now that this is settled, I’ll leave you to it. And remember, Aina, this is a top secret mission. You can’t let anyone know about it.”

“I won’t! Please leave it to me!” she exclaimed, full of confidence.

The headmaster smiled at her before walking away. With every step, his lips curled more and more into a disturbing, crooked smirk—a far cry from the fatherly smile he had shown Aina. He laughed at the foolish girl who had believed his lies so easily.

Unbeknownst to him, Verner and his friends had listened to their entire conversation from their hiding places. They exchanged a look, astonished by what they’d heard.

Chapter 18: Round Them All Up

Since I had absolutely nothing to do, I decided to train a little.

In a way, that was how the game was supposed to go—you had to grind to improve your Verner in between events. I just didn't think that it would apply to me too.

I started training my magic on autopilot, and at the same time, I created seven balls out of mana. I kicked and tossed them around to pass the time. Then, I transformed the balls into little fairies and had them play together. Doing this sort of stuff allowed me to improve my accuracy and control over my magic.

Fire, water, earth, wind, thunder, ice, and light... I could freely use seven out of the eight magic attributes.

At the moment, I could use around ten spells simultaneously. From what I'd read in history books, saints and witches of the past had trouble using only two at the same time...and only a few ever managed to achieve *that*.

I'm pretty awesome, aren't I? But for real, I have no idea what to do.

If I approached the basement, the witch would run away and I'd have no way of finding her. I had no idea who was spying on me, so even if I tried to be discreet and headed there alone, there was a chance I'd be found out.

The witch might very well have put one of her monsters on lookout duty right at the entrance of the basement. If it were to alert her of my presence before I could silence it, the witch would have all the time in the world to run away before I reached her.

All in all, I was stuck until I found a way to deal with her teleportation ability.

To teleport, the witch would have to break up her body into tiny particles and fly away faster than greased lightning. If anyone other than her were to try something like that, they'd die on the spot. Only the witch could withstand it thanks to her strong dark powers.

Maybe I should put up a barrier around the entire school?

If I made one that prevented even the smallest of particles from getting through, she'd most likely be unable to leave the school grounds. But that would mean that no air would come through either... There were tons of students in this school. I couldn't take such a risk.

Plus, I doubted that the witch would fall *that* easily. I'd need some time to defeat her...and what if she used fire spells while the academy was fully enclosed? That would be an absolute disaster!

So I'd thought up a way to trap the witch, but there was a chance I'd lose—oh, and kill people in the process—because of the lack of oxygen.

Maybe I should evacuate the students before putting up a barrier?

If I did something that showy, though, the headmaster himself would easily notice and warn the witch...let alone the spies I couldn't identify.

In that case, taking care of the headmaster had to come first. But I'd look like a villain if I attacked him without cause.

Aaargh... I can't think of any decent ideas!

I had a few plans in mind that were in the maybe-that-could-kind-of-sorta-work-but-who-knows category, but nothing reliable.

I really had to find a way to deal with the spies first... I needed to identify them all and find solid evidence before I could take care of them...preferably, all at once.

But how? Should I just round 'em up and question them till they tell me what I want to know?

I mean, I could *technically* do it. Considering all the stuff Ellize got away with in the game, I definitely had the authority to...but my image was bound to suffer.

"Lady Ellize, may I talk to you for a moment?" Layla asked after knocking on my door.

What could she want? Well, I wasn't doing much at the moment, so there was no reason to refuse her.

So yeah, sure, come in!

She opened the door and entered, accompanied by Verner and his little troop—aka the same six people who'd fought against Pochi.

Is this route really gonna continue with these six as the main party? Is this a joke?

Under normal circumstances, they would've been arrested immediately for trespassing on the floor I stayed on. After what had happened last time, though, I'd told Layla to hear Verner out before getting mad if he ever came by.

"Layla?"

I figured they'd come because they had something to tell me, but they were all staring at my room in disbelief, completely silent.

What's wrong? Don't you guys have something to say? Oh, I get it now—are you bothered by the little guys flying around in my room? Are they too distracting? All right, all right, let me get rid of them. So, what's up?

"Layla, I can't read your mind," I tried again.

"Oh... I-Indeed... They have a rather strange story to share with you," she said, pointing at Verner and his friends. "I suggest hearing them out."

A strange story, huh? Honestly, I wouldn't expect these guys to have anything remotely normal to say, so I'm not too surprised. Go on then, I shall listen. Make it short, though, I don't have all day!

"What is it?" I asked.

"Well, in fact..."

Verner told me they'd overheard Aina and the headmaster have a very suspicious chat earlier. Something about Marie cheating, and Aina being a perfect student and the only one he could trust. He'd told her that there were spies in the school, and that she needed to watch me closely.

Yikes. Classic villain speech.

But hey, I finally knew who would notify the witch of my presence on Eterna's route—as well as others'. It was Aina!

In the original game, she was supposed to try to kill me. Now that *that* plotline had disappeared, she was being manipulated by the enemy instead. She was bound to become my enemy no matter what.

I had a feeling that if the headmaster were to tell her I was a fake, and that she had to kill me to prove her loyalty to the real saint, she'd do it without any hesitation. Well, she wouldn't be in the wrong, though—I *was* a fake.

“Foolish girl... How could a daughter of the honorable Fox family be deceived so easily? Marie won fair and square; anyone who saw the match would know that. Aina lost because she wasn't strong enough, that's all there is to it. Her father is an exemplary knight. He would despair if he heard that she was blaming her opponent instead of accepting her shortcomings.”

Layla sounded like she was disappointed in Aina, but I couldn't help but feel bad for her. What could I say? I was just too soft on cute girls. If she'd been a dude, I would've laughed at her instead.

Time to defend her a little.

“Layla, please don't be so harsh. People get fooled because they don't expect others to have bad intentions. From what I've heard, Aina grew up sheltered, and she did not experience any hardships. She felt hurt and anxious after losing to Marie, and the person who reached out to her when she was at her lowest was the headmaster himself. How could she expect a man in such a position to betray her trust?”

On top of that, half of what he'd told her was true. There *were* spies in the academy—like him, for starters.

I remembered hearing somewhere that convincing liars always mixed in some truth in their fabrications. Plus, all jokes aside, I did think that—considering Aina's psyche and the situation she was in at the time—it would've been almost impossible for her to resist the headmaster's words.

At least now I had the confirmation that the headmaster was on the witch's side in this world too.

“I don't think Aina could have avoided falling for his smooth talk considering her mental state,” I continued. “I believe it's now clear that the headmaster

serves the witch... She would be the one who benefits most from knowing about my whereabouts, after all.”

“It stands to reason, indeed... Lady Ellize, you’re amazing, as always. I, Layla, can only stand in awe of your infinite wisdom.”

Good, Scotterbrain, praise me more!

Verner, Eterna, Fiora, Marie, and...uh, the other two...had done a great job. Now I had a perfectly good reason to seize the headmaster. As long as I caught him, the rest of the moles would be easy enough to find.

“I still can’t believe the headmaster is working with the witch... He was the head of Lady Alexia’s—the previous saint’s—guard...”

I mean...that’s exactly why. Saints turn into witches, that’s just how it is. Remember, class, the current witch’s name is Alexia. This’ll be on the test, all right?

The headmaster hadn’t betrayed anyone. If anything, he’d stayed faithful to his master, Alexia, the entire time. She’d just changed classes, and he’d followed right along, going from the saint’s knight to the witch’s.

It didn’t really matter to me, though. An enemy was an enemy, regardless of their reasoning. I still had every intention of destroying the witch and her clique.

Now that I had a nice justification, it was time for me to step in and deal with the headmaster!

While he was a former head of the saint’s guard—which made him more or less on par with Layla—he didn’t hold a candle to me.

Barrier, magic enhancement, and...there! All righty, none of your attacks work on me now. Too bad, bro!

Now all I had to do was overpower him, catch him, and force him to give me the names of the other spies, et voilà!

Right as I was about to leave, though, someone stopped me. “Please wait, O glorious saint.”

Great. Four-Eyed Pervert. It’s kinda impressive how this guy always looks like

he's on the verge of betraying me.

“Even if you succeed in seizing the headmaster, I doubt he will give you the names of all the spies. He'll hide some.”

That...makes sense! Damn, even Four-Eyed Pervert says smart stuff sometimes!

“Would you leave this to me? I'll spy on him myself and expose every single one of his allies for you.”

Could he manage that? I had my doubts. Four-eyed Pervert was a minor character and definitely not one of the most capable ones.

Won't he get caught and end up giving information to the enemy instead?

Still, there were some perks. If it went well, it would help me a lot. On top of that, he didn't know much about me or my plans, and I didn't really care if he fell into their hands... Actually, that would be kinda nice.

The way he looked at me was absolutely disgusting, and once—though I was pretty sure he thought I hadn't noticed—I'd seen him steal a spoon I'd used and stuff it in a bag. It'd irked me so much that I hadn't even found it in me to confront him, but I hated his guts. *Piece of trash!*

“I understand,” I said. “I shall leave this matter in your hands, then. I'm sure you will live up to my expectations, Mr. Supple Ment.”

Whatever. I don't care what happens to you, anyway. Go forth and accomplish your mission. I shall bury your bones and—actually, nah. I'll toss 'em in the sea, that's the best I can do.

“Oh... To think I'd hear your lovely mouth say that you have expectations for me! Ooooooh! What an honor! These words alone can sustain me for ten— No! For a hundred years, at least! Please leave everything to me, my dear saint! I, Supple Ment, will do everything in my power to satisfy your expectations!”

Urgh... Disgusting...

After I'd waited for two weeks, Four-Eyed Pervert came to find me with a satisfied grin and a piece of parchment paper.

“I’m sorry for making you wait, O glorious saint. Here is the list of the scoundrels hidden in this academy I’ve been able to find after investigating for two weeks,” he said, handing me the paper.

I didn’t really wanna touch something that creep had touched, so I had Layla grab the list and read out the twenty-four names.

I’d never even heard of most of them. Hell, I wasn’t even sure they were even mentioned in the game in the first place. Obviously, the headmaster and Aina were also listed.

I suspected that most of the people who were helping the headmaster had been duped—just like Aina—but a few of them were probably real followers of the witch.

If the contents of this list were correct...he’d done a pretty good job.

Four-Eyed Pervert, you did well for once.

Layla didn’t seem convinced, though. She was reading through the list again and again, her face falling as she did.

“Is this a joke, Mr. Supple? I must say I’ve started to suspect you of being a traitor after seeing this. You gave us a false report to make us grow suspicious of people who did nothing wrong on purpose, didn’t you?! You want to weaken humanity by having us doubt each other!”

“How vexing. Why would I ever offer my heart and my loyalty to someone other than Lady Ellize?”

Layla flew into a rage. “Then why did you write this sad excuse of a list?! Most of the people you listed are devoted to helping humanity! They’re illustrious knights who fought by the previous saint’s side!”

Four-Eyed Pervert shrugged as if to taunt her.

To be honest, what Layla had just pointed out made me believe the list was perfectly accurate.

I see, so that’s how it is... The previous saint’s knights are ganging up together to help her.

I had doubted Four-eyed Pervert for a moment, but the fact that he’d brought

such a suspicious list to us without trying to justify himself in the slightest made me think the results of his investigation were valid.

“They’re all respectable people! Certainly, they’ve retired from the saint’s guard because of their age, but they’ve decided to continue to devote themselves to our great cause by raising new generations of knights! I won’t let you mock such devoted and honorable individuals!”

“I’m not trying to mock them,” Four-Eyed Pervert retorted. “I don’t care if they served the previous saint faithfully. The fact that they’re betraying humanity *now* is proof enough that they’re lowlifes. Layla, you need to stop thinking that everyone values their oath and pride as much as you do.”

“How dare you?!” Layla roared, grabbing her sword.

Four-Eyed Pervert gave up on arguing with her and prepared to use his magic.

Wait, guys! You’re not gonna fight here, are you?!

“Layla, calm down,” I stepped in. “It’s regrettable, but we cannot deny the possibility that former knights may have decided to turn against us—the headmaster certainly did. Not to mention he has plenty of admirers, so some of them may have decided to follow his lead.”

“That’s true, but...”

Layla reluctantly let go of her sword. I hesitantly turned to look at Four-Eyed Pervert.

Urgh... I really don’t wanna look at him. Why’s he smiling just because I’m looking at him?

“Mr. Supple, could you tell me how you compiled this list?”

“What a remarkable question!” he exclaimed, praising me. “The traitors are all using the same means of communication. Stil’s birds, in fact. The birds—named after the person who discovered them eighteen years ago—have a peculiar ability, you see. They developed the capacity to blend into their surroundings to evade predators and, thus, are almost invisible. They’re also great at mimicry. They can imitate the sounds of other animals to drive away their predators. As you can guess, many people were interested in their

incredibly useful abilities, so they began domesticating them around fifteen years ago. Their invisibility makes them easy to carry around without anyone noticing, and the fact that they can mimic voices means they can pass on messages. Delightful creatures, are they not?”

He seemed overjoyed to share this information with me.

I don't care when they were discovered. They're birds and good messengers, that's all I need to know.

“I caught the Stil's birds the spies were using to contact each other and discreetly replaced them with birds I trained myself. Now, every time they try to communicate secretly with each other, the birds relay their messages to me. Naturally, I did not swap all the birds at once—I was very methodical and exchanged them one after the other slowly. With this information, it was rather easy to find their meeting places and listen in on them as well. I've also taken advantage of the times when they've left their offices empty to dig around a little... Let me assure you that I have put the past two weeks to good use. I'm positive I've discovered everything they were hiding.”

He was actually surprisingly capable.

Taking over their means of communication...that's clever.

It was the equivalent of wiretapping their phones.

Given that there were neither phones nor the internet in this world, people had to rely on more primitive ways of communicating. Now that I thought about it, it made me realize all over again just how great of an invention the telephone had been.

“You're really sure this list is completely accurate?” I asked.

“While I cannot tell you whether they chose to join the witch willingly, or if they were tricked by the headmaster, I can confirm that they are all involved without a shadow of a doubt. I must advise you to detain them all first before ascertaining their guilt or innocence.”

“Is it possible that more spies escaped your notice?”

“It's not impossible. It's unlikely that they would have made no contact with

any of the others during the two week span, but certainly not entirely impossible.”

Unlikely but not impossible, huh?

That meant there was room for failure even if we caught everyone on this list at once. Still, there was no way to know for sure unless we actually tried it.

I had to accept the fact that we’d done everything we could.

Which means...it’s time to go for it!

I could’ve gone for a safer approach and had Supple continue his investigation, but the headmaster would most likely continue to recruit more students in the meantime and make the situation even more complicated.

I was also a bit worried that the witch would panic and flee if all of her spies stopped contacting her at the same time.

I didn’t have a choice. I’d have to get help from the pervert again.

“In this case, we ought to act swiftly. I only have one worry—if the witch stops receiving messages from her spies, she’ll notice that something is wrong and might flee. To avoid this, I’ll need your help, Mr. Supple...”

“Naturally. I shall replace the Stil’s birds the headmaster uses to contact the witch herself. After you detain him, I’ll pretend to be him and communicate with the witch in his stead. I believe this is the best course of action.”

“I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

I was impressed to hear he’d thought of that already. He didn’t do much in the original game, but as it turned out, he was super duper helpful.

Are you still the same Four-Eyed Pervert I know?

Thanks to him, I could move on to operation Round Them All Up!

Let’s go all out, yeah!

The plan was rather straightforward—we’d use the stealthy birds controlled by Supple to invite everyone to one place for an important discussion. We’d just have to pretend to be the headmaster for them to believe it. At the same time,

we'd send a similar message to the headmaster from one of his fellow spies, leading all of these idiots to happily gather in the training room for a (fake) clandestine meeting (lol).

The training room—a large space about the size and look of a gymnasium—was located on the campus, next to the main school building. Okay, it wasn't just “about the size and look of a gymnasium,” it *was* literally a regular gymnasium. I'd never really understood why a school for knights had such a thing, but yeah. Honestly, I suspected the guy in charge of hiring illustrators had been a little too lazy and had simply taken a free stock picture off the internet.

Anyway, I was there, hidden behind a curtain and ready to storm into action. As I waited, I pondered over the (not so) impressive gymnasium—um, training room, sorry—of this school.

“What happened? Why are you all here?” the headmaster asked, puzzled.

“What do you mean? You told us to come!”

“Nonsense! Why would I do this?!”

Would you look at that? The idiots are at it. Keep going while I activate my...barrier! You're all sitting ducks, heh heh!

“Darn! It was a trap!” the headmaster exclaimed as he noticed my barrier.

Too late! You'll never escape me! Checkmate!

A bunch of small fries ready for the taking, heh heh! I swung the curtains open dramatically and stepped forward.

“Lady Ellize?! What is going on?!” Aina all but screamed.

She looked like she had absolutely no idea what was happening. *I guess it makes sense, the poor girl was just being used.*

Four-eyed Pervert snapped his fingers with a smug face. The Stil's birds that had been resting on the fools' shoulders or heads started repeating the last things they'd heard in unison.

“Be careful not to get noticed by Ellize.”

“That lass is so easy to fool. What an idiot.”

“Everything we do is for our dear master, the witch!”

“Shouldn’t we just lure Ellize out and beat her up ourselves?”

Some of the statements were quite incriminating, indeed.

A few people glared at the headmaster, their eyes full of animosity.

“Headmaster! What is going on?!”

“Why in the world are they planning to hurt Lady Ellize?!”

“Did you not seek us out so we could protect the saint together?!”

So these guys are the ones that got played, huh?

The crowd split into two factions in the blink of an eye: the true followers of the witch on one side, and the ones who’d been fooled by the headmaster on the other.

“Calm down! There are dozens of ways to mess with Stil’s birds. Just because they repeated something doesn’t mean they necessarily heard it from the people here! Saint, please do not let yourself be fooled by such tricks! This man is the true traitor!” he cried, pointing at Four-Eyed Pervert. “He’s trying to turn you against your faithful supporters! Please believe me! Everything I do, I do in the best interest of the saint!”

I see, I see. Everything you do is in the best interest of the saint, huh? I do believe that, actually. It just so happens that you’re talking about a completely different saint, aren’t you?

Chapter 19: Knight vs. Knight

“I believe you. I’m sure you’re doing everything you can for *your* saint. That’s how I know that you serve the witch,” Ellize answered the headmaster with a calm and composed tone.

However, Verner and his friends didn’t quite understand what she meant. If she *did* believe that the headmaster was devoted to the saint, why would he serve the witch? That didn’t make any sense.

The headmaster, on the other hand, seemed to understand exactly what she was getting at. His face paled.

“I know all there is to know about the saints’ greatest secret. I know who the witch is,” Ellize continued.

“So you knew... I suppose I won’t be able to turn this around then,” he said, pulling out his sword.

Verner didn’t get it. He could feel the two were discussing something crucial, but he couldn’t grasp the hidden meaning behind their words.

“The saints’ secret? You know who the witch is? Lady Ellize, what in the world —”

“Let us discuss this matter later, Layla. Focus on the situation at hand for the time being.”

Even Layla, the head of Ellize’s guard, didn’t seem to know what was going on.

As Ellize had pointed out, it wasn’t the time to consider such things. The headmaster rushed at Ellize, his sword at the ready.

He’s fast, Verner thought.

In spite of his age, the headmaster’s moves were swift and decisive, befitting a man who’d spent years leading the saint’s guard.

However, Layla—the current head of the guard—was right by Ellize’s side. She quickly unsheathed her own blade and easily parried.

“Sir Dias! I won’t allow anyone to harm Lady Ellize! Not even you!”

“Layla Scott...”

Layla vs. the headmaster. A duel between the current head of the guard and one of her most illustrious predecessors began.

The people witnessing their fight could only make out the silvery afterimage of their blades and hear the high-pitched, telltale sounds of blades clashing.

Their swords crossed again and again, scattering sparks around them. Every time they seemed to take some distance, their swords immediately met again. Their movements were so fast that they appeared to be swinging several blades at once. In a way, their fight almost seemed rehearsed—it was too perfect, too masterful, too spectacular.



In class, Verner had practiced exchanging slow blows with his training partner. They'd take turns attacking and defending very deliberately to look for the best possible way to parry every kind of slash.

It was a way to learn how to limit wasteful motions. Since the students both moved their swords very slowly, they'd always see the blows coming. If they did not have the time to block in spite of seeing the attack very clearly, it meant their movements weren't efficient, and they'd naturally strive to correct them. When both partners succeeded in doing that, they'd find themselves in a bit of a tricky situation: neither of them could ever land a hit, and they'd be locked in a stalemate. Usually, when that happened, the teacher would make them stop.

Layla and the headmaster were in the exact same situation. Their movements were perfectly efficient and neither of them could find any weakness to attack. Unlike the students, however, they were fast... Unbelievably so.

Verner wondered whether the rest of the world appeared motionless to them.

The faster the attack, the less time you'd have to block it. And yet, these monsters somehow managed to figure out the best possible way to defend and retaliate in that split second.

Layla and the headmaster kept switching back and forth between attack and defense. They seemed to live on a different plane of existence altogether—one where everything was much, *much* faster.

They were miles ahead of Verner.

While everyone was engrossed in the duel between the two masters, Ellize's attention was somewhere else entirely.

The only reason Verner even noticed was because he heard Aina's voice.

The girl had just dropped her dagger to the ground. She was crying. He noticed that Ellize was standing right next to her, and suddenly understood what had happened.

Aina hadn't been able to handle her guilt and had tried to commit suicide.

He never would've noticed, he realized.

It wasn't necessarily his fault. He wasn't an unfeeling person who didn't care what happened around him, but in the middle of the current mess, who would even think to look at the young girl? Everyone was too concerned with dealing with their own safety.

That was how tragedies were born. People averted their eyes because they "had no time for this" or "had more important things to do" until it was too late.

Ellize was the only one who wasn't like that—regardless of the situation, she'd respond to any plea for help, even the weakest of them all. Even if she had more important things to handle, she'd take a moment to embrace anyone who needed her.

"Lady Ellize... Leave me be. I've participated in this horrible plan... I can't be redeemed anymore. I can't face my father..."

Aina's face was drenched in tears. Ellize was hugging her, caressing her back gently to calm her down.

Even the greatest saint in history couldn't prevent some people from getting hurt. Albeit remarkable, she was still only human.

Still, even if she couldn't help everyone, she'd reach out to those she could. As long as they were within her reach, she'd never abandon anyone.

Verner had learned that on that fateful day. Today, he got to witness it once again.

"Everything's fine," Ellize reassured her softly. "I know you were trying to protect me. You just made a little mistake. It can happen to anyone."

"But... I-I did something unforgivable—I helped the witch..." she said in between sniffles.

"I forgive you."

Verner had no doubt she'd forgive anyone any offense, no matter how bad.

He could hear from the tone of her voice that she didn't blame Aina in the slightest. She was nothing but kind.

It was like breaking a dam. Aina started sobbing loudly. Ellize didn't seem to

mind the fact that her dress was getting wet and continued to hug her.

“It’s all right. Everyone will understand. They’ll all forgive you too. Right, Verner?” she asked, seeking confirmation.

He immediately nodded, and his friends followed suit.

Mr. Supple—who’d been fighting the witch’s followers—had somehow found his way over. He was basically crawling on the floor, looking up at Ellize in awe and repeating “how precious” over and over again.

Go back to your fight, pervert!

“Of course,” Verner said.

“I agree. You haven’t done anything bad, Aina,” John continued.

“Everything will be okay, Aina. You can make up for your mistakes in due time,” Eterna concluded with a smile.

“They’re right... Let’s do our best for the saint together from now on, okay?” Marie said.

“We should do that! Let’s be friends, Aina! I’d love to fight by your side next time,” Fiora added.

Even though Marie had been rejected by Aina once in the past and accused of cheating, she wasn’t angry. She extended her hand toward Aina once again, and so did Verner.

Aina hesitantly took Marie’s hand—the one she’d slapped away before—in her own.

“Let’s go, then!” Verner exclaimed.

With Aina joining their party, Verner and his friends hurried over to the group of people who’d been played by the headmaster and started helping them fight off the witch’s followers.

The saint’s followers quickly gained the upper hand. Although the witch’s followers were almost all former knights, they’d aged. They weren’t in their prime anymore—in fact, they were barely even half as strong as they’d once been.

Raw power alone wasn't what decided the fight, though. Somehow, the headmaster's troops...weren't as motivated as the saint's. Somewhere, deep inside their hearts, they must've known that what they were doing was a mistake.

They'd devoted their lives to fighting for the saint to protect the world. Verner had a feeling they wanted this to stop; that they wanted the witch to be stopped. They just didn't have the heart to cast her away.

That was probably the main reason why Verner and his group—mere students—won.

One of them wasn't as easy to deal with, though. The headmaster, Dias, was still crossing swords with Layla; he didn't show any signs of fatigue.

"Why are you doing this?! You fought alongside Lady Alexia to take down the witch! Why would you sell your soul to her and betray your true master now?!" Layla scowled.

"I've never betrayed my master, and I never will. I'll protect the saint until my last breath."

"Stop lying, traitor!"

Silver flashes cut through the air and metallic sounds echoed through the training room as the two fighters moved in circles, exchanging position several times. The most Verner could do at his current level was follow the afterimage of their swords. Verner heard three...no, four impacts in the span of a single second. They continued to exchange blows, their fighting rhythm never falling into any specific pattern.

They refused to rest, nor did they tire.

How many times had their swords crossed already?

At least a hundred times, Verner thought.

And yet, their speed had not fallen at all. If anything, they were even faster than in the beginning.

"Miss Layla! We'll support you!"

A few of the students who'd been used by the headmaster tried to enter the fight to help Layla, but there was no place for them in such a duel. In this room, only Ellize was strong enough to join this fight.

"Weaklings... Disappear! You won't ever leave a scratch on me!" Dias exclaimed, slashing at them with his sword and unleashing a bolt of lightning.

The people who'd tried to get closer ended up losing consciousness. Even the ones who were standing further away—like Verner and his group—fell on their backsides from the impact.

Excluding Layla and the headmaster, Ellize was the only one still standing. She didn't make a move, however—she calmly watched over her knight.

Layla had escaped Dias's attack by leaping. She changed her stance to hold her sword with both hands, then brought it down on the headmaster with all her strength.

It pierced the floor. The headmaster had dodged, and he swung his blade in retaliation once more. Layla had predicted this. She got her sword out of the floor, cutting a chunk out of it in the process, and parried right on time.

A loud clanking noise echoed through the room, making everyone's eardrums quiver, and Layla and Dias both staggered slightly. Their legs were firmly grounded, however, so they managed to avoid recoil as they both tried to overpower the enemy. Their swords remained locked.

"You called me a traitor? Don't make me laugh. I never betrayed anyone. This world itself betrayed *us*! You'll come to know the truth too, and you'll despair and hate this world, just like I did."

"Stop with the nonsense!"

"It's all right if you don't understand. I'll simply keep protecting Lady Alexia, as I always have!"

They stared at each other. Dias could see the raging fire in Layla's eyes, and Layla could see the serene calm in Dias's. It reminded her of an old tree.

They suddenly stepped back, breaking the stalemate, and at the exact same

time, struck their opponent once more.

Dias's sword was home to thunder, Layla's to fire. The elements clashed as lightning and flames welled up, filling the air.

Dias twisted his body to dodge Layla's horizontal slash. Behind him, a deep scorch mark appeared on the wall of the training room.

Layla moved to the side to dodge the blade that approached her from below.

A bolt of lightning hit the ceiling, marring the otherwise pristine white ceiling.

After each blow, Dias's lightning and Layla's flames scattered everywhere, making the training room increasingly hotter.

Neither of them had any intention to retreat, though. They were studying the other's techniques, looking for—and correcting their own—flaws as they went. Their attacks were getting sharper and sharper.

“Did you lose your mind?!” Layla screamed. “Lady Alexia is already...”

Layla didn't understand. Why was he committing such acts while pretending he wanted to protect someone who was long dead? He had no way of doing that anymore. The previous saint, Alexia, had lost her life after defeating the witch.

Perhaps he meant to protect her honor, Layla thought. But then, why join hands with the witch? That was obviously the very opposite of what Lady Alexia would've wanted. Layla had no idea what he was trying to accomplish.

“Were you going to say she's dead? She isn't. Lady Alexia is alive. They're just pretending otherwise!” he roared.

“Wh-What?!”

“All of these fools forgot that they're alive only thanks to her, and they're now calling for her death! I'm her knight! I'll protect her to the end, even if I have to turn the world into my enemy!”

Layla hesitated for just an instant, too shaken up by what Dias had just said. It had only been a fraction of a second, but even that brief lapse was too long in a fight of their level.

Even though Layla tried to block Dias's attack, her stance wasn't perfect, and she was sent flying back. She violently slammed into the wall.

Dias took the opportunity to get closer, then swung at her with all of his strength. Layla still managed to put up her sword and block, but she was getting pushed back.

"What in the world..."

"It looks like your little saint already knew about this. Ellize, why don't you explain it to her yourself? Don't you want to tell your dear knight the truth?" Dias taunted.

He continued applying force to his blade, which was getting dangerously close to Layla's throat. She did everything she could to hold on, but her arms were shaking. She was obviously in a tight spot.

However, Layla didn't give up. She kicked Dias in the stomach and forced him to step back. She immediately jumped to the side, getting out of the corner she'd been forced into.

Dias refused to give chase. He simply stood there, a faint smile on his lips. It was meant to mock Layla—the idiotic knight who didn't know anything—but it just looked sorrowful.

"If you won't, I'll tell her! Pay attention, will you? The witch is none other...than the previous saint! Lady Alexia is the very witch you're trying to defeat!"

This time, Layla truly froze.

She wasn't the only one—Verner; Eterna; even that weirdo, Supple...everyone but Ellize was in utter shock.

The witch is the previous saint.

Dias's words were hard to believe, and everyone was convinced it was a lie. Or rather, they wanted to believe it was a lie. They *needed* it to be.

If it was true, then...they could already imagine what the next step was.

"Stop lying! Lady Alexia wouldn't... The previous saint would never become a witch... That's just..."

“You’ve started thinking I might be telling the truth, that it would make sense, right?”

Layla couldn’t think of an answer. She roared to show she didn’t trust him one bit, but her voice barely came out.

He had to be right.

Layla had always thought that some things simply didn’t add up.

Why would the saint always pass away right after defeating the witch? Why would another witch always appear after a few years? Many had witnessed the birth of a new saint. They were always taken from their parents at birth to be raised and protected by competent people, but the saints *did* have parents. What about the witch, though? No one had ever witnessed the birth of a witch. But why?

Dias had just given her the missing piece of the puzzle.

“I-Is...Lady Alexia the only one who...” she trailed off.

“You’re a smart person; you don’t really need me to spell it out for you, do you? But I will answer you. This *always* happens. The witch Lady Alexia defeated was her predecessor...no, to be accurate, it was the saint from two generations before her. Her predecessor was killed before she could defeat a witch. Anyway, what I mean to say is that every saint becomes a witch, eventually.”

Layla stepped back without even realizing it. She was trying her hardest not to think about it, but awful images kept popping up in her mind.

The kindhearted Ellize would turn into a hateful witch that’d terrorize humanity... This future couldn’t be allowed to come to fruition, but Layla couldn’t stop herself from imagining it.

What would she do, then? Would she keep protecting Ellize even after she became the witch, just like Dias had? Would she...turn against her?

“Are you still in shock? I understand... I only learned about this terrible truth after Lady Alexia defeated the previous witch. When she died, her dark powers invaded Lady Alexia’s body. At the start, she was still herself. She didn’t understand what had happened and was quite shaken. I urged her to get

treatment and took her back to the saint's castle. While she was undergoing treatment there, I went to the king. I had to report the witch's death, you see. Do you know what happened then?"

"Well... Obviously, they tried everything they could to cure Lady Alexia..." Layla said, praying in her heart that her wishful thoughts were right.

I'm right... I have to be right...

Even though Layla was praying with all of her soul, her wish did not come true.

"I was suddenly restrained by the king's men. They didn't explain anything; they simply threw me into a cell," Dias stated.

"What?!"

"After a few days, a minister came to tell me the truth. He explained that turning into a witch was the fate of all saints. He said that they'd tried to slay Lady Alexia as soon as she'd returned to the saint's castle, but that she'd fled. 'You're a good knight,' he told me. 'Please forget about the previous saint and devote your life to protecting the next one. We need you.' I pretended to accept and became a teacher here..."

As he spoke, Dias punched the wall in anger a few times. Telling his story must have brought back unpleasant memories.

At birth, saints were taken away from their parents to accomplish their mission. They were raised with only one goal in mind—to defeat the witch. They were told that they'd get to live a normal life after carrying out their duty, but that was a lie. Only betrayal—by the very people who were supposed to protect them, no less—awaited them.

Dias was enraged at the way his beloved saint had been treated.

"I'll protect Lady Alexia, no matter who I have to face," he concluded, readying his sword once more.

Layla didn't manage to resume her fighting stance. She didn't know what to do or how to react to what Dias had just said.

If Ellize's whole identity had to be stripped away from her as the price for

defeating the witch...maybe it'd be better if the witch was left alone, after all.

Why not? The witch was currently alive, but she couldn't do much. Since she was so scared of Ellize, it was almost as if there was no witch at all. The world was still at peace!

It would be better for humanity if Ellize continued to keep the witch at bay as long as possible, rather than kill her. She should remain as the saint.

Layla was ashamed of her thoughts, but she couldn't stop herself.

"I see you lost your will to fight. I understand," Dias noted, his voice cold.

He swung his blade at Layla, ready to finish her off. Right before it could connect, however, it was split in half from the hilt. The two pieces flew out of his hand.

It was Ellize's work. She'd used a blade made out of mana to block Dias's sword, and she'd destroyed it in the process.

"Ellize!"

Chapter 20: Uneasiness

Phew, that was close!

Layla had been on the verge of getting hit, so I'd decided to step in. I'd managed to destroy the headmaster's sword just in the nick of time.

I'd already freaked out when I saw Aina about to hurt herself, and now Layla'd almost lost her head!

I'm really not into gore! Pretty girls should stay alive and well, thank you very much. And Scotterbrain, who told you to stop fighting? Pull yourself together!

"Lady...Ellize... I-Is what he said...?" Layla asked.

"It's all true," I answered, tensing up a little. "After the saint kills the witch, she'll take her place. In turn, another saint will be born. This endless cycle will not be broken as long as the saints continue fighting."

"Endless cycle." I'm using pretty cool words, aren't I? I'm a fake, so I'm not actually involved in the whole cycle thing, though. If I do kill the witch, I'll break the loop.

"Ellize... I understand why people call you the greatest in history. To think anyone could cut through my blade so easily... I see your reputation has not been exaggerated."

Why, thanks! It's an honor to receive praise from an expert such as yourself! I'll still beat the shit out of you, though. How dare you bully my little Scotterbrain, huh? Wanna die, huh?! You and your pretentious old-timey-gentleman mustache!

"Tell me, Ellize, why do you fight if you know the sad truth? Nothing but tragedy awaits you at the end of your path."

*Huh? What? Is he trying to deal psychological damage to me now that he's done with Layla? If we're going for a battle of wit, I'm happy to partake. Bring it on, old man! I'll have you know I've won my fair share of Tw*tter arguments! I'll*

make you regret picking on my dear Scotterbrain!

“I’m fighting because *you* want me to.”

“What?”

Ignore the actual point of the argument and go straight for an ad hominem attack! That’s how you do it! It’s all your fault, bro!

While I was at it, I figured I might as well ask him about some stuff that had puzzled me when I’d played the game.

“Let me ask you something—why did you continue working here? You say you want to protect the witch, but you’ve helped nurture dozens of knights. It’s bound to make her situation more difficult. You haven’t done anything to lower the quality of the education the young men and women receive in this school. Instead, you’ve helped talented individuals, such as Layla, come into their own.”

I’d always wanted to ask the writers of the game about that. It made absolutely no sense to me. As a supporter of the witch, why not do everything in your power to sabotage the school from the inside? There had to be *hundreds* of ways to lower the quality of the classes and slow the progress of promising students.

And yet, Dias hadn’t done any of that. Powerful knights continued to graduate every year to join the fight against the witch.

He’s a dumbass, isn’t he? It’s like he’s literally asking to lose.

“You want to protect the witch, that much is true,” I continued. “But at the same time, you hate to watch Lady Alexia lose herself to the darkness. You hate it all the more because you truly love her. Am I wrong, headmaster Dias?”

Would you look at that? Cat got your tongue? Did I get it right? Is that it? C’mon, say something, old geezer!

“You may be right... Lady Alexia...isn’t herself anymore. I may have wanted someone to stop us, because she wouldn’t have wished for all this. Deep inside, I always knew it.”

Right on the money! Maybe I should’ve become a detective. I’m pretty good at this, ain’t I? Always determining the one truth with the body of a saint and the

mind of a piece of shit. Her name is— No, wait, that's a terrible catchphrase... Huh. Guess I'm not cut out to be a detective.

"I hadn't realized it, but I suppose that—in some corner of my heart—I must have always believed it'd be better for her if the next saint stopped her... I never wanted to see her like this, terrorizing and killing mindlessly..." Dias continued.

He's become quite honest. I suppose that settles things here, though. We want to stop the witch, and you want us to stop her so that she'll be liberated from the curse. We've got the same goal here! There's no need to fight anymore!

"Then—" I started.

"However!" he cut me off immediately.

Hey, don't start yelling all of a sudden! You startled me!

"I cannot allow *you* to kill her. I know that being defeated by another saint might be the best outcome for Lady Alexia, but...it cannot be *you*!"

So other people can do whatever they want, but I can't? That's kinda mean, you know?! Actually, it's discrimination, mister. Why am I being excluded? Discrimination isn't okay!

"I know I've betrayed humanity once, but I still think of myself as a knight," he started explaining. "I cannot knowingly send humanity to its downfall. Ellize... You're known as the greatest saint in history. In my heart, that spot will always belong to Lady Alexia, but I can understand why people would praise you so. You are indeed...powerful," he said, looking down at what was left of his sword.

He used lightning to recreate the missing part of his sword, turning it into a complete weapon once more.

Man, that was COOL!!!

I immediately thought of a few taunts—I mean, in what world was he going to be able to touch me, even with that—but I had to admit, he was pretty damn cool.

"But that's exactly why you cannot be allowed to kill Lady Alexia. If you do, you'll become the next witch...and no one will be able to stop you. You'll

murder the next saint, and the one after her... Never again will anyone strong enough to face you appear in this world. Humanity will be doomed. Even if you don't believe you could ever do evil, you will! When you become the witch, your mind will be tainted! You cannot be allowed to turn into a witch!"

All riiiiight. I see where you're coming from now.

He didn't know the truth about me, so it made sense for him to reach that conclusion.

He tried to attack me, but I stopped his lightning blade with my bare hand. I pressed my other hand on his chest.

And...BOOM!

I unleashed my magic, and he was sent flying back until he hit the wall.

"Ar...gh... You're...too strong. You'll lead the world...to its end..." he muttered, struggling to speak as he leaned against the wall.

There was no coming back from this attack; he wouldn't stand up again. He'd be sent to a holding cell soon until he could be judged. For some reason, though, that thought made me a little sad.

Meh. He's going to be sent to jail anyway, so what's the harm in putting his mind at ease?

I had no interest in hugging old men, though, so I had no intention to show him kindness in the same way I had for Aina.

"Don't worry. I won't lead this world to doom. I won't turn into a witch."

"Foolish girl... Fate doesn't care about your wishes. No matter how badly...you want to do good, saints always turn into witches. When you become the witch, you'll eventually succumb to the curse...no matter how hard you try to fight it. Just like...Lady Alexia..."

He was gasping for air after every few words, but he stubbornly clung on, refusing to lose consciousness.

At the end of the day, the old man was still an outstanding knight. Even though he knew there was no way he could defeat me, he was still desperate to protect this world.

I walked up to him and whispered as quietly as I could, making sure that only he could hear, “The real saint is that girl over there, Eterna. I was mistaken for her at birth. I’m nothing but a fake. You’ll keep my secret, right?”

“What?!” Dias exclaimed, staring at me in disbelief. “How is this possible?! No... I can’t believe it! How could the greatest saint in history be...”

It looked like he didn’t quite believe me, so I showed him my palm—the one I’d used to catch his lightning sword a few minutes before. I’d used magic to protect myself, but the old man was pretty damn strong. Granted, I hadn’t used my barrier—I wanted to avoid killing him on the spot and all. Still, he’d burned my hand a little.

The saint couldn’t be hurt by anyone but herself or the witch. Dias knew that full well, so I trusted he’d understand.

“I’ve already found a way to defeat the witch even without the powers of the saint,” I whispered, showing him my best saintly smile. “Even if I kill Lady Alexia, I won’t become a witch. I’m a fake, after all.”

Dias stared at me absentmindedly for a while before bursting out laughing.

“HA HA! HA HA HA HA! I can’t believe this! You’re incredible, Ellize. Truly, you’re quite something! Perhaps you’ll finally bring about the change we desperately need and break this hateful cycle...”

I’d never heard someone laugh so joyfully before.

Eventually, he collapsed, out of strength.

Hey! Don’t collapse now! I didn’t get close enough to whisper in your ear so you’d fall on me! What am I supposed to do with your head on my lap, huh?! Urgh. I’m not your pillow. Get out of the way, old geezer!

“May I...make a request?” he asked.

“What is it?”

I’ll do whatever you want, so for goodness’ sake, get off me!

“If... If it’s at all possible...please save Lady Alexia. I know I’m asking for the impossible, but...I can’t help but feel like you might be able to pull it off,” he pleaded.

With that, he passed out, his damn head still on my lap.

You're heavy! Move!

I couldn't believe he had the guts to conk out on me after making such a ridiculous request.

You're overestimating me, old man! Why do I have to save the witch?! It's not even doable in the first place! Unless... Oh, it might not be completely impossible.



The headmaster's supporters were all seized and taken in by the knights that had hurried to the training room to help the saint.

Aina and the other students and teachers who'd been misled by the headmaster had been taken in for good measure too, but they were quickly released after giving their testimony.

While everything had gone according to plan, Verner and his friends were gloomy as they dragged themselves back to their dorm. They couldn't stop thinking about the terrible secret they'd uncovered today.

Witches were all former saints. A saint would turn into the next witch after defeating the current one.

Verner and his friends were already quite shocked, but the adults—Layla and Supple—had an even harder time coping with the news.

Layla had been born twenty years ago, during the hard-won window of peace earned by Lady Alexia. A mere three years after her birth, seventeen years ago, the new witch had been born—or rather, Lady Alexia had fully become the witch. The fleeting peace had come to an end immediately, but Layla still remembered her early childhood fondly. Those years had helped her grow into the person she was today.

As for Supple, he'd been born during a difficult period twenty-five years ago. Lady Alexia had yet to defeat the previous witch back then, and the world was a living hell—as it had been for over forty years, ever since Alexia's predecessor had fallen to the witch without accomplishing her duty.

Living through those terrible times—although they had only lasted five short years—had given birth to that feeling of adoration he had for the saint. While he was now a devout supporter of Ellize, it was Lady Alexia—the one who'd brought back peace at that time—who had first sparked his pious feelings.

Learning that the saint they'd both admired so much had become the current witch wasn't easy to take in.

Seven years ago, Ellize—who'd been barely ten at the time—had started her work as the saint. She'd managed to create a world so peaceful that it almost seemed like there was no witch at all.

None of the previous saints had succeeded in giving humanity more than five years of peace. Now that they thought about it, it meant that no saint had succeeded in keeping the witch's curse at bay for any longer than five years. However, Ellize had already maintained the peace for seven years. And unlike the other saints, she'd done so while she was alive and well.

That fact alone was more than enough for anyone to see why she was called the greatest in history.

As Dias had suggested, though, being the world's greatest salvation also meant that she had the potential to become the world's greatest threat.

Saints turned into witches. If Ellize were to become the witch, no one would ever manage to defeat her—she was just too powerful. Even if new saints continued to be born, they'd fall to her one after the other, powerless to stop her. The world would fall into ruin, and people would die off until no one was left.

Verner understood all of this, but it left him feeling even more puzzled. Dias had done everything in his power to stop Ellize from going after Alexia for that very reason, so why had he laughed at the end?

Ellize had said something to him—something that had made him change his mind. He'd said she might break the cycle before passing out on her lap.

Supple had been fairly vocal about how jealous he was—and sure, Verner had felt the same—but that wasn't the point. He was too busy pondering about important things to dwell on his petty emotions.

Just what in the world could she have told Dias? What had she shown him? What had changed?

Verner didn't know.

He'd asked Ellize about it, but she'd simply dodged the question by saying it was a secret between the two of them. She must have had a very convincing argument for Dias to have changed his tune so quickly. And she'd shown him something too...something she'd had on her. *What was it?*

Only one thing was certain—with the headmaster and his minions out of the way, the witch had lost her eyes in the academy.

She was still lurking somewhere within the school grounds, but it was only a matter of time before they found her.

Supple had full control over the Stil's birds. He'd pretend to be the headmaster and continue to communicate with her so he could feed Ellize information about the witch instead. Then, they'd be able to attack her.

Ellize would definitely come out on top if they were to fight head-on, but then what?

If Ellize won...it would be the beginning of another tragedy—the greatest of them all.

Was this truly the path they ought to follow?

Perhaps the best option would be to stop Ellize from facing the witch altogether. After all, wouldn't it be better if she continued to keep the peace just like she had been up until now?

Although none of them could bring themselves to voice such questions out loud, they endlessly turned it over and over again in their heads.

Side Story: The Saint of Plenty *Ten-Year-Old Ellize*

*I can't take it anymore! Hi everyone, it's everyone's favorite (fake) saint, Ellize! Are you wondering why I'm suddenly screaming the same thing as that gorilla from the Kell*ggs cereal commercial?*

Five years had passed ever since I'd gotten reincarnated into this world, and while my mental age didn't quite fit, I was currently a ten-year-old at the end of my tether.

What am I so done with, you ask? The food!

The food in this world was utter crap!

I was the one and only saint, humanity's only hope, wasn't I? (I most definitely was not.) You'd think I'd be treated well since I was even more precious than the royals, right? (Once again, I wasn't, but who cared about that?)

And yet, I was served the same awful food on the daily. Plus, everything was *incredibly* salty.

Monsters rampaged all over the land, which meant agriculture was difficult, and there was a food shortage. As you can probably guess, some serious effort had to be made to preserve anything edible for as long as possible.

The best method in this world was to pickle it in salt. Pepper was a precious and expensive commodity, so it couldn't be used for no reason. Now, you might be thinking that keeping things frozen and fresh would be easy in a world where magic existed, but it was actually quite difficult! Very few people had the necessary skills to do so.

Noble families often employed ice mages to help with the issue, but naturally, commoners couldn't afford the same luxury.

The situation might've been different if there were a few farmers that knew how to use ice magic—actually, no. In retrospect, they probably would've left their farms behind to find better employment in that case. There was no doubt that working at a noble's estate would be easier than plowing the fields. Even if

they didn't go job-searching themselves, they'd eventually be noticed by a noble family and asked to join their estate. Peasants couldn't exactly say no.

Anyway, that was why there weren't any ice magic users among the farmers, and why pretty much everything was pickled in salt for preservation purposes. Most veggies were treated like sauerkraut or pickles, while meat and fish were either pickled or smoked.

In conclusion, everything tasted like salt, with a side of salt, accompanied by a heavy helping of salt. The nobles and royal family stored some of that food as part of the taxes they received, and that was how this mountain of salt ended up on my plate.

To be honest, I'd enjoyed these dishes at first—they tasted very different from what I was used to eating in Japan. Salty things were nice to have...from time to time, that is. I just couldn't stomach so much of it every day.

Thankfully, unlike Middle-Age Germany, water was readily available...for me, at least. I had water magic to thank for that. I didn't have to survive on beer.

As for the commoners...I wasn't too sure what they drank, but I had a feeling it was beer ninety percent of the time. They probably only had access to water when it rained. Wells were too dangerous to use because of the risks of poisoning by monsters.

Anyway, in a nutshell, I'd been eating super salty food for the past five years, and I just couldn't take it anymore. Well... That, and I thought it was really sad how many farmers died of hunger every winter.

Farmers were the unsung heroes of society! Without them and the food they produced, everything would collapse. The fewer farmers were left, the more people had to preserve what little they had on hand, and the more pickled shit we'd all have to eat.

If the farmers were wiped out by monsters, no amount of aristocrats would be able to hold the country together...

Which was why I felt like doing something about the farmers dying was vital—especially for my tummy! This was no time to take away over half of the food they produced as taxes, for crying out loud! Letting them starve would only

aggravate the situation and blow up in everyone's face—including mine.

I don't wanna starve! I didn't come to this world to suffer like this!

Anyone could whine that they hated something, or that they couldn't take it anymore, but words alone wouldn't change anything.

Had I been a smart cookie—you know, like almost *every single* damn isekai protagonist who somehow seemed to remember every internet page they'd ever visited—I would've been able to save the day with my extensive knowledge of agriculture. The issue was that I wasn't all that smart.

I had no idea how to revolutionize the agriculture system, or the way food was preserved. All I knew was that potatoes, sweet potatoes, and soy were so easy to grow that Germany—as well as most of Europe—had suffered from way less food shortage after potatoes had been introduced. You know, only basic facts that pretty much everyone and their grandma knew in the twenty-first century.

Still, even if having potatoes would make everyone's life easier, where was I supposed to find them?

If they existed in this world, the farmers would be cultivating them already!

“Lady Ellize, I've brought a new flower to decorate your room. Should I put the pot here?”

“Yes, right there would be perfect. Thank you very much.”

While I was thinking about all that, one of my guards brought me a new potted flower.

It was a very pretty blossom with white petals and a yellow, somewhat bulky center, almost like a pillar.

Huh. It looked a lot like a potato flower...

A...potato...

HERE THEY ARE! HOT DAMN, I ROCK!!! Wait, hang on! Why're you guys using potatoes as decoration?!

As soon as the member of my guard left my room, I jumped to my feet,

rushed to the flower, grabbed it, and uprooted it.

As I'd expected, I uncovered a little tuber.

Damn! It really is a potato!

I thought I might have been mistaken, but no, it was a potato—a perfectly good one, at that. I decided to cook it and have a bite to confirm later on, but it definitely looked like one.

I might be able to do something about the situation now. This one little vegetable is opening a whole new world of possibilities!

Potatoes were very nutritious, so if I taught farmers how to grow more of them from this one, we could improve the food shortage. They'd also be instrumental in curing scurvy...*maybe*? I had a feeling they worked on that illness, at least.

Another good point about potatoes was that there were *dozens* of ways to cook them. They were great no matter how you made them—simply boiled with a bit of butter; cooked into potages, soups, and omelets; fried into chips; or, hell, you could even make cakes with them with a little more effort.

Nothing's as versatile as a potato! You could make a full-course meal using them in every dish.

I had a hard time understanding how such an incredible vegetable had ended up as a decoration in my room. Hadn't anyone ever tried to eat the tuber?

I supposed I'd only thought about that because I knew about potatoes from the start, but still...shouldn't at least *one* person have tried it before? If people had been crazy enough to look for ways to eat poisonous fishes like fugu, or to stuff little auks into dead seals, waiting until it all fermented and mixed together before slurping it from the seal's asshole, taking a bite out of a plant wasn't asking for too much, was it?

Or maybe people were just batshit crazy in my old world. That's also a possibility. Actually, yeah, they definitely were.

While I could probably never replicate the ingenuity of the people who'd figured out how to eat fugu, I could deal with potatoes.

They were known to be easy to grow, and they grew fast—it only took around four months for them to mature. While that was a fairly short time as far as crops went, it was still too long. Plenty of people would die by then, so I figured I'd cheat a little.

First of all, I used my magic to fly south.

Back on earth, potatoes originated from South America—around the Andes, if I wasn't mistaken. I assumed a similar place had to exist somewhere in this world, and I might find tons of potatoes ready to harvest there.

Anyway, I ended up finding the place I was looking for, but...there weren't that many potatoes there. Not enough to really help the farmers, so I decided to bring them back to use as seed potatoes.

It was a bit of a pain, but I'd grow them myself for the time being. I didn't have the time to grow them the normal way, though. I had to make enough of them for farmers to be able to plant and eat, and I had to do it *fast*.

Thankfully, I could count on my magic. It'd probably make this whole endeavor easier.

I started cutting the sprouted potatoes. I made sure the part I'd sliced was dry on each potato before I planted them.

I wasn't exactly sure *why* I was supposed to do that—something to do with the germination process, and uh, the preservation of the seed, or whatever. Apparently, if that part was still wet, there was a risk the potato would rot, so you had to leave them in a well-ventilated place until the piece was all dried out.

I didn't have that much time to waste, though, so I just used water magic to suck out the moisture and light magic to simulate sunlight and hasten the drying process. I also relied heavily on earth magic to plow the ground.

I'd also heard that potatoes could develop toxins if they were left in the sun for too long, so I made sure to bury them deep enough.

Anyway, now that everything was set up properly, it was time to use healing magic. I pumped them with extra energy so they'd grow faster.

Why would excess energy make a potato grow faster? Dunno!

The only thing I knew for sure was that it was a dangerous technique. My potato plants wouldn't live any longer, they'd just live...faster. Since they'd grow sooner than expected, they'd also wither sooner.

Now that I think about it, I might be onto something here. I could do a cool nature restoration project. Assuming these plants lose around a tenth of their life span... I could plant a bunch of millennium trees, and they'd still stand tall for around nine hundred years. Good enough, right?

Anyway, my potatoes had grown quite a bit while I'd been pondering over that. I left the biggest and healthiest stem alone and uprooted the rest.

Time for another round of healing—I mean boosting—magic.

I ended up harvesting around ten potatoes of various sizes. I repeated my earlier process—cutting, drying, and planting—with these.

Oh, and by “I,” I mean my golems, by the way.

I couldn't be bothered to do all that manual labor myself, so I'd created golems with earth magic.

Did you really think I'd work the fields?! I was a shut-in in my past life! What kind of NEET becomes a farmer, huh?! Go on, my little golem minions! What's that? Overtime pay? Sorry to disappoint, but this company does not comply with any labor laws. You'll keep toiling for free till you drop dead!

“Goo...” the golems whined through the little holes that were most likely their mouths as they worked.

A few hours later, my little golems crumbled down, their duty accomplished. They left behind a beautiful field of potatoes.

Nice, my field is twice as big as the Tokyo Dome now. All hail magic!

I just needed to let everyone know that potatoes were edible and to teach them how to grow them. I'd give them this whole field too while I was at it.

I had to make sure the potatoes and farming methods would be shared with every village and city. Once that was done, I wouldn't have to do anything anymore. The farmers would take over. Soon enough, they'd work like faithful

little ants to bring me, their glorious queen, all the potatoes I could eat!

Now, how do I convince them that potatoes are yummy? The best course of action would be to let them have a taste.

Since no one had thought of eating potatoes before, no one had any clue how to cook them. Which meant...I'd have to cook myself, huh?

I'll invite a few big shots—royalty or aristocrats—and a few chefs...but what should I cook them?

Boiled potatoes were a staple, but I couldn't forget about French fries and potato salad either...and baked potatoes with butter were great too...

Might as well just cook a few different dishes to see what sticks.



After Ellize taught the people that potatoes were edible, they quickly spread through the land.

Before she'd made that discovery, people had no idea potatoes could be eaten.

Even the word "potato" itself had been coined by Ellize. In the past, the plant had a different name altogether.

It grew beautiful white flowers, so it had been sometimes used to decorate households. However, people had never paid much attention to its peculiar bulky root.

There were several reasons for that—first of all, potatoes were scarce and their place of origin unknown. Potatoes grew in the remote Southern mountains, but very few people ever ventured into that range.

A knight who'd unexpectedly found one during one of his travels had brought some back, which was how they'd found their way into this part of the world. However, as fate would have it, that knight had passed away from a mysterious illness a few days after his return without telling anyone where he'd found the potatoes.

The pretty flowers had motivated a few farmers to try to cultivate the plants, but they most likely made mistakes in the process, and some sort of disease had

killed most of the potatoes before they could be harvested. That disease had even affected the next batch of potatoes, so the farmers had concluded that the plant was incredibly hard to grow, and they'd given up on cultivating large quantities of them.

As one could expect, scarce decorative flowers rarely found their way to the homes of commoners. Only nobles purchased them, and they had no need to try to eat unknown plants—they weren't as desperate as the poor commoners, after all.

That wasn't to say that all nobles led a comfortable life. The food shortage was very severe, and some nobles also had difficulties keeping themselves fed. Obviously, these people didn't have any resources to waste on decorative flowers, so they didn't have access to potatoes either.

Despite all this, there still *had* been a few attempts to eat potatoes before. These people had simply been unlucky. Some had fallen ill because of the toxins contained in potato sprouts, some had tried to eat unripened ones, while others had eaten potatoes that had turned green.

No one had been there to tell them to remove the sprouts, to wait until the vegetables were ripe, to avoid eating them after they turned green, to keep them out of the sun, to look out for signs of diseases, or to bring new ones from the mountains. With all this knowledge, cultivating and eating potatoes was easy. Without it, not so much.

As a result, barely anyone had tried tasting them, and the few who had...had not had a very good time. Since they'd only ever eaten spoiled or toxic potatoes, they'd assumed that was how the plant was supposed to be: pretty, but inedible. If at least one of the people who'd tried potatoes had had a little more success, things might've been different.

Had they known they could be eaten, farmers would've redoubled their efforts to figure out a way to grow them efficiently. The risk of food poisoning mattered very little to starving people. They likely would've failed time and time again, but eventually, they might've mastered the cultivation process of potatoes and figured out a safe way to eat them.

However, that hadn't happened. That was how things always were—the

simplest of things went unnoticed for the longest time until someone had a flash of genius. Conversely, misguided ideas also tended to stick around for the longest time.

Thanks to Ellize, all the misunderstandings that surrounded potatoes had been cleared away.

She'd never noticed that the potatoes that had been brought to her castle to decorate her room were toxic from disease. Instead, since she'd brought brand new ones from the mountain range, she'd been able to easily cultivate them using the proper method.

She'd spread those healthy plants...and saved the common people from starvation.

Seven years after those events, a group of magic academy students was enjoying a plateful of potatoes after training.

Potatoes had become one of the most common vegetables in Giardino. They could be found on everyone's plates—nobles and peasants alike.

There were two people in particular who were eating much more than anyone else in the cafeteria: Verner and John.

One of them had been born into a noble house before being banished at a young age, while the other was a commoner who'd experienced hardened life as a soldier. Regardless, they'd both lived through difficult times and knew the pain of starvation. They were thankful they got to eat their fill every day now.

"You know, the best thing about this school is the meals. Can you believe they give us *so much* every single day? Hanging around nobles is the best, truly," John said, his mouth full of food.

While John and Verner were both commoners now, they'd lead very different lives. Up until three years ago—back when he'd been fourteen—Verner had been raised as the son of a noble family. Since Ellize had popularized potatoes seven years ago, he hadn't suffered from hunger much except when he'd wandered about alone after getting kicked out by his family.

On the other hand, John remembered the terrible famines that used to

plague the poor when he was younger. During the cold winter days, he and his family would huddle around the fireplace. He remembered very vividly munching on roots to distract himself and forcing himself to sleep to try and bear the hunger.

In those times, someone would pass away every winter. Everyone was skin and bones. People withered away without knowing when their turn would come. He could never forget his older brother's face when they'd found the cold body of their newborn brother one morning. He hadn't gotten to live longer than a day. He remembered his shock when he'd heard of his friend's death on another such morning—they'd had such a long chat the day before.

Having lived through all that made him all the more thankful for the democratization of potatoes.

He remembered the rush of euphoria he'd felt after eating his fill for the very first time just as vividly as the losses. He'd thanked the saint with every bite as tears ran down his face—so had everyone else in his village.

Thinking back on it, that defining moment might've been when he'd decided to become a soldier.

He wanted a job with a decent wage to give back to his parents who'd done everything they could to raise him and his siblings in those difficult times. More than anything else, however, he wanted to protect the saint—the person who'd given them so much.

That had been his very first motivation.

"You're a little off the mark, John. Even though this school has always had a majority of noble students, it couldn't afford to feed them so well until seven years ago," a voice suddenly explained from under the table.

John and Verner almost dropped their forks, chock-full with bites of potatoes on them. They looked under the table, trying to figure out what the hell was happening, and found their teacher, Supple Ment, skittering around on the floor.

What in the world was he doing?

"Hm... Mr. Supple? What are you doing there?"

“Nothing much. I’ve been doing some research, you see, and it would appear Lady Ellize sits in this area almost every time she visits the cafeteria. I figured that this exact position would give me the best chance of getting stepped on by our glorious saint.”

What is wrong with this pervert?! Verner and John mentally screamed in unison.

This school was meant to foster knights that would protect the saint. How could one of the teachers be the biggest threat to her safety?! No one could ever blame the two students for thinking that Supple had to be kicked out of the school if it ever hoped to fulfill its mission of protecting the saint.

“If I may,” Supple said again, still laying face down on the floor. “Plenty of nobles struggled to feed their children up until seven years ago. You may not be aware of this, but in those times, even nobles suffered from the food shortage—the situation was *that* dire.”

Nobles collected food from the commoners as taxes. However, if the commoners barely produced anything, then there was barely anything for them to collect in the first place. As a result, some noble families had also suffered from starvation.

As far as the commoners were concerned, giving away what little food they’d managed to produce was a death sentence. In those days, they’d tried to hide the food away instead of paying their taxes. When the people were cornered to that extent, eating whatever they could came first. They couldn’t afford to worry about what punishment the nobles would dish out.

People had killed each other over food. They didn’t hesitate to fight their neighbors, outsiders, and—in some cases—even the nobles that ruled over their territory. They’d gang up together and loot their food reserve.

The situation had been so dire back then that they simply couldn’t unite against the monsters—they were too busy killing each other.

“Thankfully, everything changed. The introduction of potatoes didn’t just help fill people’s stomachs—it brought back peace and harmony as well. Since they didn’t have to fear for their own survival anymore, people were able to care for their neighbors again. They became able to fight together against a common

enemy,” Supple explained as he carefully examined the legs of the students making their way into the cafeteria from his spot under the table.

He had no interest in looking at the schoolgirls’ legs, but he didn’t want to miss Ellize walking in. Thus, he kept his eyes trained on the door. Apparently, Supple was able to recognize Ellize immediately simply from her legs.

“This is the very reason why Lady Ellize started being revered as the greatest saint in history. Please don’t misunderstand me. While they don’t come close to her in terms of scale, the past saints and knights have killed their fair share of monsters, just as Lady Ellize has. However, getting rid of beasts doesn’t do much for children who suffer from hunger—it doesn’t fill their stomachs. Dying at the hands of a monster and dying from starvation isn’t so different, is it?”

John nodded in silence.

Killing monsters was a way of protecting the people. However, if they died of starvation a few days later, what was the point? What difference did it make?

“I’m not trying to make light of the accomplishments of the brave saints who dedicated their lives to fighting the witch and her monsters. However, that is the duty of all saints, is it not? Many saints of old have certainly fulfilled their duty, but Lady Ellize is different. She goes above and beyond to help people. She’s done more than any other before. She’s the only one who’s succeeded in bringing a smile back to the faces of starving children. This is why the people love her so much. You may not be aware of this, but the common people usually don’t even know the saint’s name. Lady Ellize is the only one to receive such love and admiration.”

The fact that so many knew of Ellize’s name was the greatest proof of her popularity.

The saint was the symbol of hope, the only person who could defeat the witch. However, in the eyes of the commoners who didn’t even know whether they’d live to see another day, stories of the saint and the witch’s fight were far removed from their everyday concerns. They usually only referred to the saint by her function and thanked her for ridding them of the monsters. The knights and soldiers who fought alongside her knew her name, naturally, but as far as commoners were concerned, the saint was simply a glorious figure they’d never

seen before. They respected her, certainly, but they didn't seek to learn anything specific about her.

In fact, up until now, the people would have never noticed if, say, the current saint was a fake all along and the real one suddenly reclaimed her rightful place. They'd mistakenly think the two people were one and the same. They didn't know her name or what she looked like, so how could they tell the difference?

Neither Verner nor John knew the names of the previous saints until they'd learned them in class. It had been their very first time hearing that the previous saint's name was Alexia, and the name of the first one had been Alfreia.

Everything was different when it came to Ellize. She'd descended from her almighty position to save them. That was why everyone knew of Ellize's name.

"She's truly incredible..." Verner whispered, admiration thick in his voice.

Strength wasn't all about defeating your enemies. Ellize's first priority had always been to extend a helping hand to the people who needed her. She'd never let anyone down.

Her resolve was what had inspired so many to strive to become knights.

I'll protect her, no matter what, Verner and John promised themselves.

As Verner and John made a solemn vow in their heart, Supple suddenly whimpered, "Unh!"

The person he'd been waiting for had finally stepped into the cafeteria. Against all odds, Supple truly *had* identified her by her legs. Ellize was coming his way, accompanied by someone else!

Thanks to his thorough investigation, he knew that Ellize usually avoided the center seats. She also had a tendency to go right—he'd even noticed her walking on the right side instead of in the middle of corridors.

The spot he'd chosen was immediately to the right of the entrance. On top of that, Verner and John, two students with whom she seemed to be on friendly terms with, were seated right there.

She'll come here! There's a very high chance she will! Supple thought, his lips twisting into a creepy grin as he started shivering with anticipation.

However, something unexpected crushed Supple's expectations.

While Ellize had started walking in this direction, another student was also approaching. She was much closer than Ellize, so she'd reach the seat faster.

Logs...?

The girl's legs were so thick that they looked like logs to him. Her every step was so heavy that Supple felt as if the ground was shaking. Her body was similarly solid and trunk-like. The lower part of her body was pretty much an inverted triangle. Her legs were just as built as her trunk, and they did a wonderful job of supporting her thoroughly trained body. As for her bulging chest... *No, those ought to be called pectorals*, he thought.

A bulky woman—he'd mistakenly thought she was obese at first glance, but she was pure muscle—was rapidly approaching the seat under which Supple was hiding.

Supple trembled in fear as the being—he couldn't bring himself to call her a woman, she was nothing like Ellize—approached.

This was the Training Institute for Magic Knights—a place where students trained their minds and bodies to fight against monsters. They learned to become living shields, ready to protect the saint at any given moment. Seeing a prospective female knight with a strong, muscular body in such a place shouldn't have come as a surprise.

If anything, that student should've been praised endlessly for her dedication. Her muscles were the fruits of her labor, proof she'd trained diligently with everything she had.

Her appearance was of no concern to her. Instead, she'd polished her very flesh to the upper limits to live up to her duties.

She'd trained for over twenty-four hours right before the tournament and had been forced to forfeit because of muscle pains. Had she participated, she might've been able to snatch the victory.

Steam was coming out of the girl's mouth (what?!), a fierce expression on her face as she stomped toward Supple.

Supple tried to stop her. “W-Wai—”

Sadly for him, she hadn’t heard his call. She trampled him mercilessly.

Oh, incidentally, the student weighed over a hundred kilograms.

At any rate, the evil had been defeated. At last, the stalker had received a befitting punishment.

Ellize vaguely looked in that direction and changed her trajectory. She sat at another table and began to dig into the assortment of potatoes Layla had just placed in front of her.

Afterword

Nice to meet you or, for the readers who have been following the web novel version, it's good to see you again. I'm Kabledondaikou—the archduke of kabledon.

Thank you very much for picking up a copy of *Fake Saint of the Year: You Wanted the Perfect Saint? Too Bad!*

The concept I decided to go for when writing about this “fake saint” was “two negatives make a positive.” Both the person getting taken over and the soul transmigrating into her body are completely hopeless human beings, but their negative sides somehow end up merging into something positive.

The main character, Ellize, can hardly be described as having a good personality, yet she's seen as the perfect saint by everyone around her. I hope you enjoyed this gap while reading the book.

This work was originally published chapter by chapter on the internet. At the time, the title was a little different, but I ended up making a few changes while adapting the story to turn it into a series of books.

Naturally, the title isn't the only thing that changed. I made corrections and improvements across the entire text, added an entirely new chapter, and created a new original side story.

As for the contents of the novel...I won't go into details here. Few people read the afterword before the book, but I'd still rather avoid spoiling anyone.

I'll let you read and enjoy it at your leisure.

I first thought of writing this story while I was in the bath. For some reason, on that day, I suddenly started thinking of a piece of shit protagonist getting reincarnated into a saint and doing whatever he wanted without worrying about the consequences. *Wouldn't it be even funnier if the main character was thanked by the other characters in spite of it all?* I thought.

After getting out of my bath, I immediately started writing, and I kept going at

it day after day. I'm not sure why that all came to me in the bath, of all places, but that's what happened.

I'm overjoyed that a story I thought of in the spur-of-the-moment eventually found its way to you, my readers. If you enjoyed it, please spread the word and recommend it to your friends.

If you asked me to pinpoint the greatest thing about this book, I'd say it's Yunohito-sama's wonderful art. Ellize, Scotterbrain, Eterna, Supple, Verner, and the others truly came to life in the illustrations. I cannot stress enough how great the art is! It really makes this book worth looking through.

What about the text, then, you ask? It's...kind of important too...I think?

This afterword is already getting quite lengthy, but please allow me to thank all the people who were involved in making this book. First of all, my editor, who worked very hard to bring my manuscript to you; Yunohito-sama, my talented illustrator; and everyone else who supported me along the way. Last, but not least, I'm eternally grateful to you for picking up this book!

Let us meet again when—if—the second volume releases!

Kabedondaikou



And let me tell you,
hunting monsters was...
super freaking fun!
Ha ha ha!

How should
I describe the feeling?
Hee hee hee...
Trampling down
weaklings with my
overwhelming powers
delighted me in the
most primal of ways.
It was just
so much fun!

Fake
SAINT
of the YEAR

You Wanted the
Perfect Saint?
Too Bad!





Look at me all you want, peasants!
Lose yourselves in my beauty!

Oh, wait not you,
shitty Four-eyed Pervert.
You don't count.

I wanna puke whenever I feel your eyes on me,
you disgusting idiot.

Fake SAINT of the YEAR

You Wanted the
Perfect Saint?
Too Bad!

I

KABEDONDAIKOU

ILL. YUNOHITO



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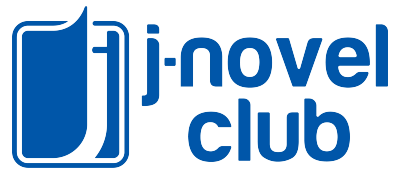




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Fake Saint of the Year: You Wanted the Perfect Saint? Too Bad! Volume 1

by kabledondaikou

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